

ALFRED  
**HITCHCOCK's**  
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

March, 1988

\$2.00 U.S./\$2.50 Can.



**THE OWL  
IN THE  
OAK**  
by Joseph  
Hansen

**AND MORE  
INTRIGUING NEW MYSTERY  
STORIES**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# HEAR THE EVIDENCE AND MAKE A KILLING.

#7176

Tales of Suspense from  
Alfred Hitchcock's  
Mystery Magazine.  
Four ghostly tales  
come to life.

#7161

A Murder of Quality  
John le Carré  
read by John le Carré

#7172

Miss Marple Investigates  
read by Joan Hickson

#7179

Ellery Queen Presents  
"The Midnight Strangler"  
and other stories

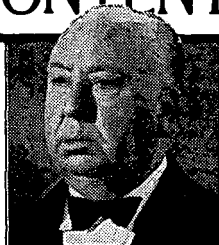


Welcome to the newest dimension  
of the world of mystery and thrills –  
the cassette "book" from 'Listen  
for Pleasure'. These books on cassette  
are ready to play on any standard personal,  
home or auto cassette player.

Now you can enjoy a selection of the world's finest mystery and thriller  
writers. Each is dramatically read by a famous actor or author such as  
John Le Carré or Nigel Hawthorne. **And you can also enjoy substantial  
savings with this introductory offer.**

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

# CONTENTS



## SHORT STORIES

<b>THE CHING LADY</b> by Doug Allyn	<b>6</b>
<b>CASEY'S LAST RIDE</b> by Robert Loy	<b>24</b>
<b>THE RETURN OF THE LATE, GREAT J. EDGAR</b>	
<b>HOOVER</b> by Dana M. Anderson	<b>35</b>
<b>OUTFALL</b> by Elliott Capon	<b>47</b>
<b>THE OWL IN THE OAK</b> by Joseph Hansen	<b>58</b>
<b>DEATH OF A ROMANCE WRITER</b> by Joan Hess	<b>88</b>
<b>TAKEOUT ORDER</b> by Robert L. Zimler	<b>96</b>
<b>LAST STRAWS</b> by Jeffrey Bush	<b>125</b>
<b>OUT OF TOUCH</b> by Lyn Peters	<b>131</b>

## MYSTERY CLASSIC

<b>THE ULTIMATE FROG</b> by Roy Dickinson	<b>136</b>
---	------------

## DEPARTMENTS

<b>EDITOR'S NOTES</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>UNSOLVED</b> by Julie Spence	<b>86</b>
<b>SOLUTION TO THE FEBRUARY "UNSOLVED"</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>BOOKED &amp; PRINTED</b> by Mary Cannon	<b>148</b>
<b>MURDER BY DIRECTION</b> by Peter Shaw	<b>152</b>
<b>THE STORY THAT WON</b>	<b>155</b>

**ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE** Vol. 33, No. 3, March, 1988. Published 13 times a year, every 28 days, by Davis Publications, Inc., \$2.00 per copy in the U.S.A. \$2.50 in Canada. Annual subscription \$19.50 in the U.S.A. and possessions; \$23.00 elsewhere payable in advance in U.S. funds. Allow 6 to 8 weeks for change of address. Editorial and Executive Offices, 380 Lexington Ave., N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. **Call (614) 383-3141 with questions regarding your subscription.** Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional mailing office, Canadian 3rd class postage paid at Windsor, Ontario. © 1988 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. The stories in this magazine are all fictitious, and any resemblance between the characters in them and actual persons is completely coincidental. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention. Reproduction or use without express permission of editorial or pictorial content in any manner is prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. All submissions must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts. POSTMASTER: Send Form 3579 to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, P.O. Box 1932, Marion, Ohio 43305. In Canada return to 628 Monmouth Rd., Windsor, Ontario, N8Y3L1.

ISSN: 0002-5224.

# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**W**e're very pleased indeed to report that at Bouchercon XVIII, held this past October in Minneapolis, Rob Kantner garnered *three* nominations for fiction awards—and won with two of them. Kantner, as most of you know, is the creator of private eye Ben Perkins and author of numerous Perkins stories and several Perkins novels. His most recent story, "Duck Work," appeared in the February issue.

Two sets of awards were presented at Bouchercon, the Private Eye Writers of America's Shamus awards and the two-year-old Anthony's, bestowed by the convention's attendees (mystery writers and fans). The PWA nominees and winners follow, with the winners in bold-face type.

BEST HARDCOVER P.I. NOVEL OF  
1986:

**The Staked Goat by  
Jeremiah Healy  
(Harper & Row)**

*When the Sacred Ginmill  
Closes* by Lawrence Block  
(Arbor House)

*In La-La Land We Trust* by

Robert Campbell  
(Mysterious Press)

*The Million-Dollar Wound* by  
Max Allan Collins (St.  
Martin's)

*"C" Is for Corpse* by Sue  
Grafton (Henry Holt)

BEST PAPERBACK P.I. NOVEL OF  
1986:

**The Back-Door Man by  
Rob Kantner (Bantam)**  
*Melting Point* by Kenn Davis  
(Fawcett)

*Nervous Laughter* by Earl W.  
Emerson (Avon)

*Dark Fields* by T. J. McGregor  
(Ballantine)

*Trace: Too Old a Cat* by  
Warren Murphy (NAL)

BEST FIRST P.I. NOVEL OF 1986:

**Jersey Tomatoes by J. W.  
Rider (Arbor House)**

*No One Rides for Free* by  
Larry Beinhart (Morrow)

*Tourist Season* by Carl  
Hiassen (Putnam)

BEST P.I. SHORT STORY OF 1986:

**"Fly Away Home" by Rob  
Kantner (Mean Streets)**

"Quint and the Bracerros" by  
Paul Bishop (*Hardboiled*)

"Body Count" by Wayne  
Dundee (*Mean Streets*)



# Quit Playing Around!



**This is the mystery game you've been looking for!**

**Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine Game** has it all: You can play it by yourself or with friends: play the mysteries provided or make up your own.

It's unique game system allows clues to "disappear" and new information to be revealed as time goes by. You can even use the skills of Ellery Queen himself to solve the mysteries.

*Games* magazine describes it perfectly: "... it's a real mystery lover's game, with all the excitement and flavor of a well-crafted whodunit."

What did you expect, from the game bearing the name of "The World's Leading Mystery Magazine?"

## Order today!

Mayfair Games P.O. Box 48539 Niles, IL 60648

- ☐ Please send me a copy of EQMMG. Enclosed is my check/money order for \$19.00 (includes \$2.00 p/h).
- ☐ Please send me a copy of EQMMG and five extra mysteries to solve in *The Casebook of Nick Velvet*. Enclosed is my check/money order for \$27.00 (includes \$3.00 p/h).

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

"I'm in the Book" by Loren D. Estleman (*Mean Streets*)  
 "Between the Sheets" by Sue Grafton (*Redbook*)

LIFE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD:  
 Bill Pronzini

And now for the Anthonys . . .

BEST NOVEL OF 1986:

**"C" Is for Corpse by Sue Grafton (Henry Holt)**  
*When the Sacred Ginmill Closes* by Lawrence Block (Arbor House)  
*Tropical Heat* by John Lutz (Henry Holt)  
*No Body* by Nancy Pickard (Scribners)  
*Life's Work* by Jonathan Valin (Delacorte)

BEST PAPERBACK ORIGINAL OF 1986:

**The Junkyard Dog by Robert Campbell (Signet)**  
*The Cat Who Saw Red* by Lilian Jackson Braun (Jove)  
*Trial by Fury* by J. A. Jance (Avon)  
*The Back-Door Man* by Rob Kantner (Bantam)  
*Trace: Too Old a Cat* by Warren Murphy (NAL)

BEST FIRST NOVEL OF 1986:

**Too Late to Die by Bill Crider (Walker)**  
*Strangled Prose* by Joan Hess (St. Martin's)

*Floater* by Joseph Koenig (Mysterious Press)  
*Ritual Bath* by Faye Kellerman (Arbor House)  
*Dead Air* by Mike Lupica (Villard)

BEST SHORT STORY OF 1986:

**"The Parker Shotgun" by Sue Grafton (Mean Streets)**  
 "Body Count" by Wayne Dundee (*Mean Streets*)  
 "Scalplock" by Clark Howard (*EQMM*)

We're also very pleased that these lists of nominees and winners include several other past, present, and future AHMM authors: Loren D. Estleman, John Lutz, Lawrence Block, Nancy Pickard, Clark Howard, Joan Hess (whose first story for us is in this very issue), and (coming soon) Jeremiah Healy. Congratulations to them all!

In case you haven't heard . . . there's a relatively new organization out there called Mystery Readers of America, and they publish a very interesting newsletter. Newsletter isn't exactly the word, though—it's actually a journal, with an average length of sixty pages.

Each issue of the *MRA Journal* takes a particular theme in mystery fiction and covers it in depth, with articles on the subject and reviews of books both

new and old that contribute significantly to it. A recent one, for instance, is titled "Divine Mysteries" and discusses dozens of fictional clerics and their counterparts. Other issues have dealt with such subjects as "Murder

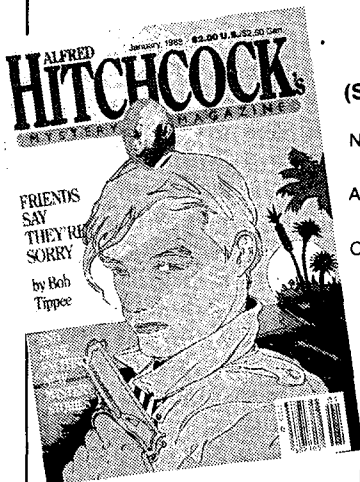
on the Menu" and "Murder and Mystery in the Far East." The journal is published quarterly; membership is \$20 per year. Write to: Mystery Readers of America, P.O. Box 8116, Berkeley, California 94707-8116.

**Cathleen Jordan**, Editor; **Lois Adams**, Managing Editor; **Brian Cox**, Associate Editor; **Ralph Rubino**, Art Director; **Terri Czezko**, Associate Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Art Editor; **Dennis Doyle**, Associate Designer; **Nancy Siwinski**, Art Assistant; **Carole Dixon**, Production Manager; **Robert J. Allen**, Production Assistant; **Cynthia Manson**, Director, Subsidiary Rights; **Florence Eichin**, Manager, Contracts & Permissions; **Sonya Castellucci**, Circulation Director, Retail Marketing; **Paul Christian**, Circulation Planning Director; **Laura Guth**, Circulation Director, Subscriptions; **Veena Raghavan**, Public Relations Promotions Manager; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **Risa Lund**, Advertising Services Manager; **William F. Battista**, Publisher

(New York: 212-557-9100; Chicago: 312-346-0712; Los Angeles: 213-795-3114)

**Joel Davis**, President; **Fred Edinger**, Senior Vice President, Finance; **Paula Collins**, Senior Vice President, Circulation; **Carl Barte**, Vice President, Manufacturing; **Stephen Policoff**, Assistant Vice President, Controller.

## *A special offer for mystery fans...*



**8 issues of Alfred Hitchcock  
for only \$11.97**

(Save 25% off the regular newsstand price)

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:  
**ALFRED HITCHCOCK**  
P.O. Box 1932  
Marion, OH 43305

☐ Payment enclosed ☐ Bill me

For Immediate Subscription Service Call  
**TOLL FREE 1-800-247-2160** (in IOWA  
1-800-362-2860).

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for your first issue.

Outside US and Poss. \$13.97 (cash with order US funds).

DHC8H-5

FICTION

# The Ching Lady

by Doug Allyn



Illustration by Steve Cavallo

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



**B**radley Cunningham has an endless reserve of small talk, a valuable trait in a bureaucrat, I suppose. So far we'd discussed the coming monsoon season, local Taiwanese politics, and even the new Buicks, though I knew he wouldn't buy one from me. Embassy staffers can import their personal cars duty-free.

I wondered when he'd get to it. We weren't friends, and I couldn't see him stopping by my office just to chat. Besides, he seemed a wee bit uneasy, though maybe that was because his tropical worsted was a better fit twenty or thirty pounds ago.

"Those Ming scrolls look authentic, Charlie," he said, with semi-sincere admiration, "business must be good."

"I sell a car now and again," I said. "In fact, I'm running a bit behind with my paperwork, so, was there something . . . ?"

"An odd thing did come up at the embassy this week," he admitted, "the ah, ambassador was approached unofficially by the Taiwanese Minister of the Interior. It seems they have a prisoner they're concerned about, a man named Doherty. They want to come to an . . . arrangement."

"Why are they concerned about him? He a Kennedy nephew, is he?"

"No, he's nobody, but they don't want an American dying

of dysentery in one of their jails just now. Bad public relations, you know."

The showroom bell jingled out front. An elderly Taiwanese in a three-piece suit and thong sandals wandered in out of the April heat to check out our stock of new and pre-owned Buicks. I kept an eye on him through my office doorway, hoping he wouldn't need mouth-to-mouth when he saw the sticker prices.

"So why don't they just cut whatsisname loose?" I said, "deport him or something?"

"They can't," Cunningham sighed. "He still has half of a twenty year sentence to serve. For smuggling drugs, I believe it was. His work record is good though, so they're ah, willing to parole him here in Taipei if we can find him some kind of a job."

He paused, waiting for me to volunteer.

I let him wait. When I decided to muster out of the army here back in '78, the American embassy treated me like the amazing invisible leper. If they wanted a favor from me now, they could ask. Politely.

"Well, Charlie," Cunningham said at last, "what do you think?"

"I can ask around," I said doubtfully, "but you know how tough it is for foreigners to find work here."

"Actually, we ah, we were hoping you could take him on."

"Me? To do what, exactly? Besides, even if I wanted to, which I don't, I don't do the hiring for the dealership."

"But you're the manager here—"

"Only because Mr. Liang thinks his customers are more likely to buy American cars from an American. If I ask him to hire some jailbird I may need a new job myself."

Cunningham leaned forward, his pudgy face grim. "Doherty's going to be released from the hospital tomorrow, Charlie. If we don't come up with something, they'll send him back to the work camps at Gaoshung. He won't last six months. The ambassador can't ask you to do it officially, of course, but if you could manage something we'd consider it a favor."

"Okay, okay," I grumbled, "I guess he can sweep up or whatever, but you owe me one, Brad."

"I won't forget it," he said, looking pleased with himself. "I don't mind telling you this thing's been a real headache."

"Most of us take aspirins for a headache," I said, "you guys just delegate yours. What's Doherty like, anyway?"

"He's ah—colorful," Cunningham said blandly, "you'll like him, Charlie. Trust me."

"Mmmmm," I said.

The next afternoon two hard-eyed Taiwanese military cops in a battered jeep dropped a passenger in front of the dealership. I'm not sure what I'd been expecting, a bombed-out flower child I suppose, but what I got looked more like a leprechaun, a wizened, wiry little character in a rumpled secondhand suit. He strolled casually through the dealership, checking it over as though he was thinking of buying the building. I didn't bother to get up.

"Mr. Doherty, I presume?" I said.

"Patrick Aloysius Doherty, at your service," he nodded brusquely, "and you'd be Charlie Marks, the gentleman in difficulty?"

"Difficulty?"

"You needn't be embarrassed, Mr. Marks, I've been in a jam or two myself in my time. Fortunately, as I'm between positions at the moment, I may be able to help you out. Assumin' we can come to an understandin' about wages, of course."

"Right," I said, "look, Mr. Doherty—"

"Don't feel you have to thank me, Mr. Marks; if Americans don't help each other out in this godforsaken country, who will, eh?"

We eyed each other in silence for a moment, across a generation or two and a teakwood

desk. "How long were you in the work camp at Gaoshung?" I asked at last.

"Ten years or so," he said evenly, "you lose track of time after a while."

"I suppose a man could work up a thirst in ten years," I said, taking the bottle of Chivas Regal from my file drawer and placing it on the desk. "Can I buy you a drink?"

"No," he sighed. "I'm afraid not. A man oughtn't to accept a drink if he can't stand a round in turn, and I'm just a tad short of funds this week."

"Mr. Doherty," I said, "I think we may just get along."

And we did. In fact, hiring Patrick was the smartest move I'd made in years. He was dependable, affable, and a born salesman who could hustle cars in three different Chinese dialects. Our gross sales rose by a quarter during his first month. Mr. Liang gave me a bonus, Patrick was grateful to be free, and I was feeling thoroughly smug about the situation. Until I took him with me to a Wednesday night poker game at Liang's villa.

Liang's home is north of the city, a mile or so up Yangminshan, Grass Mountain. The house is typical Taiwanese middle class, a rambling, red-brick ranch with a green tile roof, thick, earthquake-resist-

ant walls, and narrow, thief-resistant windows.

Liang's wife greeted us at the door, a stolid, smiling peasant woman from down island, uneducated but a hard worker and as devoted to Liang as an Irish setter. She led us through to the verandah at the rear of the house, a cobblestoned terrace with a fantastic view of the city lights below.

The two men seated at the low mahogany table were similarly dressed, shortsleeved white shirts over dark slacks, but there the resemblance ended. Fred Chen, Liang's brother-in-law, stood six four in his sandals and resembled an outsized stork in horn-rimmed glasses. He taught history at Taipei University and handled the books for Liang's varied enterprises. Liang himself was nearly a foot shorter, a reserved, gourd-shaped Taiwanese with hair and eyes as black as anthracite and a soul to match.

Liang rose as we came in. "Hello, Charlie," he nodded, "and this must be your Mr. Doherty," he said, offering his hand. "Welcome to my home."

"I'm honored, Liang Syan-sheng," Patrick said in flawless Mandarin.

"I'm afraid you must content yourself with conversing in English, Mr. Doherty," Liang said. "I need the practice and I

prefer that my wife doesn't know how much I lose. Or win," he added slyly. "And this is Mr. Chen."

"Doherty," Fred nodded, without rising, "Liang tells me Charlie hired you out of the Gaoshung prison camp. I hope you weren't there for cheating at cards."

"I've been known to shade a deal or two in my time," Patrick said smoothly, "but never in games with big fellas played on the edge of a cliff."

"A sound philosophy," Fred smiled. "Mr. Doherty, I look forward to taking your money."

"Likewise, Mr. Chen," Patrick said, with a curt bow.

"Shall we get started, gentlemen," Liang said, easing into one of the tower-backed rattan chairs. "The game is spit-in-the-ocean, jacks or better to open."

The evening passed agreeably, cutthroat poker with evenly matched opponents, sipping plum brandy with the lights of Taipei spread out below us like a blanket of stars. Patrick proved to be a ferocious poker player as well as a mighty storyteller, regaling us with tales of the Boston underworld, or smuggling in Hong Kong, while each of us waited for the run of cards that would reduce the others to begging rice in the streets.

It was as fine a night as I can

remember until sometime long past midnight, when Patrick told us about Cockeye Hwei and the old lady's grave.

"Cockeye was a crazy little fella," Patrick said, frowning at his cards. "Now, mind you, grave robbers are all crazy anyway, since there's nothin' in the tombs worth stealin' but an occasional trinket, and the graves are deathtraps that'll collapse on you if you look at 'em sideways, which Hwei couldn't help doin' because he was cockeyed. Are you familiar with the tombs I refer to, Charles?"

"Sure," I said, "little brick domes like igloos. They had 'em in Vietnam, too." I didn't bother to add that sometimes we'd stomp holes in the tops because it was easier than digging a latrine trench.

"Igloos," he nodded approvingly. "I've always thought they look more like roadside barbecue ovens. In any case, Hwei got caught when a tomb caved in on him, leaving only his poor head free. Howled like a banshee for three days and nights, which the villagers thought he was. Some soldiers found him eventually. When I met him in Gaoshung he was a certifiable loony. Claustrophobia. Afraid of the dark, couldn't sleep, couldn't even cover himself with a blanket. Many a night I held him just to keep him quiet while he mumbled and shiv-



ered. Then we began work on the Tam Sui levee, and the guards made sure Cockeye always worked in the deep trenches. Shoveled like a madman down there, afraid of bein' buried, you see, and gettin' dafter by the day. Then one night he wakes me, perfectly calm. Said he was leavin' and wanted to give me somethin' for my kindness. Told me there was a great lady buried in the Imperial Cemetery at Chunghsin, buried with all of her clan's wealth. Said I should raid the crypt and burn joss for him."

"Why didn't he raid it himself when he got out?" I asked.

"Grave rats don't get out," Patrick said. "Twenty years is the usual sentence. Or life."

"He must have been crazy," Liang said. "There are many thousands of tombs at Chunghsin. It's like a city of the dead."

"What happened to Cockeye?" I asked. "Did he get away?"

"Sort of," Patrick said. "He ran the next day. Came screaming up out of the trench. The guards shot him down."

"*Sz ren buyau dzai dzji swe-ijyau*," Liang said, and tapped the rim of his glass with a fingernail for more brandy, which his wife brought at a trot.

"Dead men don't what?" I asked.

"The dead grow lonely in their tombs," Fred translated in his impeccable university

English. "It's a folk saying, probably derived from the fact that grave robbers are so often killed when the tombs collapse."

"You'd have to be nuts to risk it," I said, tossing in my cards. "Nobody was paying attention to the game anyway. Besides, it's not a Chinese custom to bury anything really valuable, is it?"

"No," Fred said thoughtfully, "it's not. So I wonder why this Hwei thought . . . Did he know what the lady's name was, Patrick? Or when she died?"

"Shr Dz Hsi. Year of the Dog, 1889."

"So what's in a name?" I asked.

"Probably nothing," Fred shrugged, "but the name is northern Chinese, so perhaps I can throw some light on the mystery."

"Really?" Patrick said, a bit too casually, I thought.

"There are some imperial records in the basement of the university library," Fred said, "deeds, tax records, and so forth."

"Come on, Fred," I said, "she's been dead a hundred years."

"My ancestors were keeping records, Charlie, when yours were still living with wolves and painting themselves blue. If this lady is more than just a fairy tale, there should be some record of her, and looking for it might be interesting, like a difficult crossword puzzle."

Fred was a crossword addict. He should have stuck to them.

The following Wednesday night, Fred Chen anteed a single sheet of paper, covered with calligraphy. "The great lady's obituary," he said smugly. "She was Ching."

We waited.

"Well for the luvva Jesus, man," Patrick exploded, "what's a Ching?"

Fred stared at him in total disbelief. "The Ching Dynasty ruled Imperial China for three hundred years," he said coolly, "but they were not Chinese. They were Manchurians. Manchu. And the Manchu did sometimes bury things."

"You're saying she was some kind of queen?"

"No, her family was military, but they must have been noble. She was buried with a dozen retainers."

"Retainers?" I said, "you mean they buried her damn servants with her?"

"Not real servants," Fred said, suppressing his irritation, "replicas of them, to serve in the afterworld. It was an old Chinese custom some of the Manchu adopted."

"But what about treasure," Patrick pressed, "gold, or jewels?"

"No mention of anything like that, only family mementoes."

Patrick sagged in his chair. Fred glanced around the table, noting our obvious disappointment. "It's like trying to explain the Buddha to baboons," he sighed, removing his glasses and massaging the bridge of his nose. "Her retainers. It says they were carved in jade. Antiques. From the Sung Dynasty."

"My God," Liang breathed softly. "Northern Sung? Or Pien-ching?"

"It doesn't say, but it really doesn't matter, does it?"

It didn't. I'm no antiques expert, but if the figurines were Sung Dynasty pieces of the quality that a noblewoman would have possessed, Liang might be able to afford one or two if he sold everything he owned. A dozen? Priceless.

"Does it ah, mention where she's buried?" I asked.

"Of course," Fred said, "on the Hill of Nobles." And he burst out laughing, a choking cackle that sounded like he was being strangled. And he would have been if he hadn't paused for breath and realized how private his little joke was. "The hill has perhaps five or six hundred tombs on it," he gasped, "maybe more. She could be anywhere."

"But aren't the graves marked?" I asked.

"Yes, but she was a woman. Her name would only have been

written on red paper pasted above the door when the tomb was sealed."

"You mean there's no carving on the stone to say where she lies?" Patrick asked. "What the hell kind of heathen way is that to mark a grave?"

"Perhaps," Liang said quietly, "they were afraid of thieves."

For a moment something dangerous flickered between them, but then Patrick slowly shook his head and began to chuckle, and Fred got the giggles again, and we all wound up laughing until the tears came. Easy come, easy go. And that might have been the end of it if Patricia Cargill hadn't dragged me kicking and screaming to the opera.

Patti runs the Air Australia agency across the street from the Buick dealership on Chungshan Road. She has hair that shines like a raven's wing, a smile like sunrise, and the body of a pro football player. But, two out of three ain't bad, as the saying goes, and in the army I learned to appreciate substantial women. And every other kind.

Patti's bright, pert, and good company. Her only flaw is that she's an evangelist for all things Chinese, and our occasional evenings together are usually spent at excruciating cultural events; museums, lectures, or

whatever. But afterwards, well . . . she makes it almost worthwhile.

She called me on Saturday and said she'd had the amazing luck to score two tickets to the opera, a Chou Dynasty classic. Amazing luck is right, I thought, smothering a groan, but I said okay. There was always afterwards.

Our tickets were for the second performance. We stood in a line that stretched two and a half blocks, at nine thirty on a Tuesday night. In the rain. To see a twenty-five-hundred-year-old opera that had been playing in Taipei for over a year. The Chinese take opera a lot more seriously than we do. I can't imagine why. The singing's deafening, the music's weird, and the plots make as much sense as ours do. None.

The story was the rough equivalent of Romeo and Juliet in Old Shanghai. Chinese opera does have one refinement ours lacks, cymbals crash at odd moments to keep you awake, which is why I was when Romeo, or whoever he was, bought the farm. Juliet told him she was going to marry his rich rival, so Romeo coughed up a little ket-chup, sang for another ten minutes, and dropped dead of a broken heart. They loaded him on a bier with his daddy's sword and stuck him in a tomb, stage right.

That's when it hit me.

I stood up and stumbled across assorted ankles and toes to the aisle, ignoring comments about foreign devils in general, and some specific ones about my mother the turtle.

"*Dianhwa?*" I asked an usher at the door, "telephone?" But he was in tears like everybody else in the place, and just waved me past. I finally found a pay phone in the deserted lobby and rang Fred Chen. No answer. I reentered the darkened theater just in time for the opera's big finish.

Juliet was dressed in her wedding gown, singing her heart out in front of Romeo's tomb. I'd just blundered back to my seat when there was a flash of lightning onstage. Suddenly Romeo's grave split open. Juliet rushed inside it and then the whole thing collapsed, burying them together for eternity. I couldn't sit down. I just stood in the darkness, staring at the shattered tomb while my insides congealed into ice and the chorus bellowed about true love lasting forever.

Patti glanced up at me, her mascara in streaks. "Charlie," she sniffled, "what's wrong? You look like you've seen a ghost."

When I arrived at Liang's villa the next night, Patrick was already there. The

sharp tang of opium smoke hung in the air, and Patrick and Liang watched, glassy-eyed and bemused, as I paced the terrace waiting for Fred. I began grilling him the moment he walked in.

"You told us the old lady's family was military, Fred. What did you mean by that?"

"Her father was a Manchu general."

"Okay, I saw an opera last night where a guy was buried with a sword. Would the old lady have been buried with any weapons?"

"The Manchu were a nomadic-warrior people," he said, shaking his head, "they didn't bury weapons with women."

"But if the family was military—"

"She was a spinster," he said, "and her father's weapons and armor would have been buried with him."

"But nothing like that with her? No metal?"

"I doubt it. Only mementoes, dresses perhaps, things like that. Why?"

I sighed and poured myself a glass of brandy. I needed it. "I just had the idea that if she was buried with weapons, we could use a metal detector to find her."

"A metal detector?" Fred echoed blankly.

"Yeah, a minefinder. Like we used in Vietnam."



"The American mind is an amazing thing," Fred smiled, "always seeking answers with technology. A minefinder. I wouldn't have thought of that."

"Yeah, well, it doesn't matter."

"Do you have any idea how many tombs are in the Imperial Cemetery, Charlie?"

"Not really, thousands, I guess."

"Correct, but the Manchu have their own section, the Hill of Nobles, perhaps five or six hundred tombs, some marked only with the family name, many not marked at all. Shr is quite a common Manchu name, you know, there might be twenty or thirty tombs bearing that name."

"So what's your point, Fred?"

"Bear with me," he said smugly, "and perhaps learn something. For instance, in Imperial China, soldiers, even generals, were low-caste, only rarely rising to the nobility. The Ching lady's father is almost certainly the only soldier named Shr on that hill."

"So?"

"And with your metal detector, we could probably locate his tomb."

"But why would we—?" I began, but suddenly I realized why, and we were grinning at each other like complete morons. "She's buried beside him, isn't she?"

"Of course," he giggled, "with no husband, where else?"

Patrick wasn't smiling. He watched us congratulate each other with an odd, hard look in his eyes that had a distinctly sobering effect. "Something eating you?" I asked.

"Nooo," he said coolly, "but before you wear your shoulders out pattin' each other on the back, even if you could find the grave, what makes you think the jade would still be there?"

"The time element," Fred said, irritated. "She was buried in 1889, during the Manchu rule. They worshipped their ancestors so the cemeteries were guarded, and later, when the Japanese occupied the island and sealed it off, no one would have risked death to steal trinkets they couldn't sell."

"Mebbe so," Patrick conceded, "I don't know about history and such, so I'll tell you what I do know about. Prison. Twenty years is the sentence for grave robbin'. Twenty damn years. We've had fun with this thing, but it's not a joke any more, is it? I can see the avarice shinin' in your faces like fire, I—" He broke off, massaging his eyes with his fingertips as though he were suddenly very tired. "I owe you and Liang my life, Charlie," he said quietly, "for gettin' me out of jail. I'd've died there. And you've all been kind to me, treated me like kin."

when you owed me nothin'. So I just want to remind you that the poor bastard who told me this story died in a ditch with his brains blowed out. There was no luck in it for him. We'd best forget the whole thing. Leave her be."

"Since your risk would be greater than ours," Liang said carefully, "perhaps you would rather not—"

"Hell, you can't do it without me," Patrick flared, "I'm the only professional thief here! In fact, if you're gonna have a go, I figure you owe me an extra ten percent for tellin' you the story in the first place."

"Ten percent?" I said. "Gee, Patrick, what about owing us your life?"

"It's true," he said, nodding vigorously, "the dysentery woulda taken me. I had to count my ribs every mornin' to make sure I hadn't shat one into my pallet durin' the night. But on the other hand, how much is the life of a dyin' man worth? I figure if I gave you twenty bucks apiece you'd owe me change. Besides, stealin' is my trade. I've given this a lot of thought. I've got a plan. A foolproof plan."

"An extra five percent," Liang said, smiling, "for your expertise. Five percent."

Patrick glanced at us and Fred and I nodded, and that was it. It was settled without so

much as a handshake. We were about to become grave robbers. And honey-dippers.

Four days later I was standing in a benjo ditch, ankle deep in sewage, while Patrick and Liang smeared slop on me, on my clothes, and on each other. The stench was terrible, but not as grim as watching Fred fumble in the muck trying to find his glasses, which he'd lost while he was coughing up his lunch. Patrick's plan was clever, but it was a little short on style.

Fred scouted the Imperial Cemetery the day after the meeting. He entered the grounds with a busload of Japanese tourists, and then wandered around with a clipboard. Nobody bothers anybody with a clipboard. He spent the day mapping the place, and noting the tombs with the Shr family name. Thirteen of them.

While Fred was playing tourist, I scrounged a serviceable metal detector from a black market dealer, a British army #4C minefinder. It weighs fourteen kilos, looks like a discus on the end of a stick, and can sense metal within thirty inches. It has a sensitivity gauge and a buzzer loud enough to wake the dead. I disconnected the buzzer.

On Sunday we met at a deserted farmhouse Liang had lo-

cated, a crumbling brick building with an enclosed courtyard in the rice paddy country north of Chunghsin. When I saw the honey-wagon in the courtyard, I realized how Patrick intended to avoid the patrols, but it was too late to back out.

Since relations between Taiwan and mainland China are tense, there are army patrols all over the place, especially at night, and nobody does much traveling without being stopped. Well, almost nobody. The island may have jet ports and atomic power, but the sewer system is still fairly crude, a network of benjo ditches which carry the raw sewage to the sea. Or they're supposed to. Sometimes the stuff clots, which is where the honey-dippers come in, three or four guys with a barrel-shaped truck which they fill with muck from the ditches, using long-handled scoops. Since the men and the trucks get thoroughly grubby in the process, everybody avoids them, including the patrols, so using a honey-wagon for camouflage was brilliant, except for the part about having to look and smell authentic.

Still, when we drove out of the courtyard in the wagon that night, our skin and clothing smeared with goo and giving off a stench that would gag a graveyard rat, we could have

fooled Charlie Chan himself. Except that every now and then Fred would lean out the window to retch on the running boards. Real honey-dippers hardly ever do that.

Blundering down the back roads in a rickety sewer truck was bad enough, but we also had to listen to Patrick's machine gun stream of advice. Our professional thief was as nervous as a nun on her first date.

"Remember, if we're stopped, nobody talks but Liang. On the hill, keep low when you're near the top so you're not skylined, and don't forget to—"

Suddenly Liang cranked the wheel over and we careened off the road, crashing through a wall of vegetation, and lurching to a halt in a bamboo thicket. I didn't know if he'd seen something in the road, or only wanted to stop long enough to strangle Patrick, but it was neither. Through the shattered bamboo branches I could see a dark shape looming over us, blotting out the stars. A monstrous, barren hill, its skeletal ridges covered with hundreds of bulbous shapes which seemed to cling to its sides like feeding leeches. Leeches made of brick. We had arrived.

We sat silently for a moment, awed by the sheer size of the hill and its thousands of graves.

"All right, young virgins," Patrick said quietly, "it's time

for the dance. Liang stays with the truck, Fred leads the way. Let's go."

I grabbed the minefinder and stumbled after Fred and Patrick into the dark. It was rough going. The light from the waning moon barely penetrated the tangled bamboo, and we were thoroughly battered and scratched when we finally emerged at the foot of the hill. Fred was all business. He took a moment to orient himself and check his map, and then led us to the nearest of the Shr family tombs.

The tombs aren't large, usually no taller than a man's head, with sealed entrances surrounded by ornate stonework. I motioned the others back and switched on the metal detector, sweeping it over the door as though I were brushing away cobwebs, my eyes riveted on the magnetometer. Nothing. We repeated the process on a second tomb near the base with the same results, and then cautiously made our way up the hill, sweeping four other widely scattered graves as we climbed. Still nothing, and Fred's list was dwindling. We swept the seventh tomb unsuccessfully and were moving across the brow of the hill when I fell.

We'd picked up our pace. The wind was rising, harrying patchy clouds across the face of the moon, and during an inter-

val of darkness I stepped into space. And tumbled twenty feet down an eroded trough. Patrick came scrambling down after me.

"Are ya all right, Charlie?" he hissed.

I wasn't all right. I'd jolted my ribs on a boulder and torn my calf open. Fireworks were dancing in my eyes and my head was pounding and then Patrick was on me, his hand clamping my mouth. The pounding wasn't in my head. It was the sound of heavy footsteps. Running.

In the faint light it took a moment to spot the source. Soldiers. At least a dozen, moving at a trot on the main road. They were in full pack and carrying heavy weapons. Night maneuvers then, not a search patrol, but we stayed glued to the hill all the same as they jogged away from us down the dirty ribbon of highway and disappeared into the dark.

Patrick helped me up and we made our way carefully back up the trough. Fred was sitting on the ground, his arms folded around his knees, rocking slowly, moaning softly to himself.

"Fred?" Patrick touched him gently on the shoulder. He looked up at us blankly, his face empty.

"I couldn't find you," he said. "My eyes are not good. And



then I . . . heard footsteps coming. I didn't know what to do."

"It's all right," Patrick said. "Charlie fell, but everything's okay now."

I collected the minefinder while Patrick calmed Fred. My leg was throbbing with a bone-deep ache. We were losing the light more often now as the wind grew stronger, mourning through the tombs. Fred consulted his map and shambled off like a zombie to the next grave. I swept it. The needle flipped over. I switched the amplifier off, shook it, and tried again. No mistake, but I was hurting so badly I hardly cared. I glanced down the slope. Damn! "Fred, Patrick, I think this is it."

"Are you sure?" Patrick said.

I nodded grimly.

"Then what's wrong?"

"If this is the general's tomb, the old lady should be in an unmarked crypt at the foot of his grave, right? So take a look. There are two of 'em."

Fred examined the domes, carefully running his hands over the lintels. "I don't know," he said, shaking his head, "maybe another daughter, maybe his wife. Neither one is marked. I just don't know."

"All right," Patrick said angrily, "so there's two of 'em. So we bust 'em both, that's all. But we can't do it tonight. The storm'll be on us soon and we

can't risk a light up here. We'll have to come back."

We moved out like walking wounded, Fred first, stumbling in a daze, and Patrick occasionally supporting me as I limped behind. The moon was covered most of the time now, and the wind was an enemy, chilling us and tearing at our clothes as we made our way down the face of the hill.

We were almost to the thicket when I heard a voice, a woman's voice, howling above the wind. I froze, then turned back toward the hill. Patrick, following with the minefinder, was staring, too.

The hill was only intermittently visible in the rising storm, but I could see something moving among the tombs at the summit. The howling was growing louder. There was nothing ghostly about it. It sounded like an animal screaming in pain.

Suddenly Patrick whirled on me. "Get moving!" he said.

"But what the hell—?"

"Move, damn you, Charlie, or I'll brain you where you stand!" He was brandishing the detector like a club, his face a mask of fear and rage. I didn't know what was on the hill, but there was a killing fury in Patrick's eyes.

I turned and limped into the bamboo after Fred.

The next day the farmhouse was like a penitentiary under siege. We slept like dead men till past noon, then stayed cooped up inside to avoid being spotted.

Liang was eager to hear about the hunt, but other than telling him we thought we'd found the grave, no one had much to say. Fred sat by a window, dull-eyed and apathetic, staring into the empty courtyard. Patrick's usual good humor had a manic edge to it, and his lips had an unhealthy bluish tinge, a reminder of how recently he'd been ill. I was feverish. The wound in my calf was inflamed, an angry, swollen gash with scarlet tendrils radiating from it. Blood poison. Probably from the muck in the ditch.

Patrick, ever prepared, had a G.I. first aid kit. He did a competent job of cleaning the wound, dusted it with antibiotics, and bandaged it tightly. He maintained a cheery, non-stop banter while he worked, all the while warning me with his eyes to say nothing about whatever we'd seen on that hill.

And he was absolutely right. I'd seen guys like Fred in Vietnam. He was on the edge of the darkness. A wrong word could push him over. The afternoon dragged slowly past. We were four friends, only hours away from mortal risk, and perhaps

riches, but we had nothing to say to each other. Fred stared, Patrick paced, and Liang watched the rest of us in gloomy speculation. I dozed, and went back to the opera.

I was in the darkened theater again, making my way through a vast, unseen audience toward a stage covered with tombs. Juliet was wearing a white gown, singing her heart out in front of Romeo's crypt, and I took my place beside her, waiting. The chorus was bellowing about true love eternal, when suddenly Juliet ran away from me. She was flitting back and forth like a moth trapped in a lantern, lost among the tombs. And she wasn't singing any more. She was howling. Like an animal. The sky exploded into light, and the tomb before me split open. I rushed into the blackness and a hand touched my shoulder.

It was Patrick.

"Charlie," he said, shaking me gently, "wake up. It's time to go."

We carefully erased all signs of our stay at the farmhouse, and buried the minefinder in the ditch. The inflammation in my calf had receded a bit, and I felt better. Even Fred seemed more animated as we loaded the tools in the honeywagon and set off in the dark.

Liang stayed with the truck as before and Patrick and I followed Fred as he moved stiffly up the hill. The moonlight was uncertain in a leaden sky with scattered clouds; but the wind was little more than a breeze. Sounds were much more audible than they'd been the previous night. The Imperial Cemetery was alive with them, rustlings and whispering, the scrabbling of tiny creatures fleeing the crunch of our shoes.

The general's crypt was near the crest of the hill and we were all a bit winded when we reached it. Fred pointed it out and then sat down without a word, folding his long arms around his knees, watching us, his gaze intense, but unreadable.

Patrick knelt and unrolled the dirty rag we'd used to muffle the tools, a leather-covered eight-pound maul, a twenty-inch steel chisel, and two pry bars. He handed me the chisel.

"We'll take the one on the left first," he said quietly.

I eased down on my knees in front of the door of the unmarked tomb, and placed the chisel tip against the brick. Patrick picked up the hammer and set himself, his feet wide apart. Our eyes met and held, and for a moment I thought he was going to say something. But he just nodded and shot me a lopsided grin. And

then he swung the hammer.

Stone chips stung my face as the chisel bit into the brick and the tomb echoed with the force of the blow. He swung again, grunting with the effort. The brick shattered, splitting the face of the tomb.

And the sky exploded into light.

A parachute flare, and then another, drifting in the night sky above us, bathing the hill in an unnatural alabaster glare. A distant voice, rendered metallic and inhuman by a bull-horn, was screaming at us not to move, and a warning shot buzzed angrily overhead.

And then Fred ran. Arms flailing, legs pumping in long, ungainly strides, he fled blindly across the hillside, stumbling, his legs continuing to thrust even when he fell, jerking him along like a smashed insect. I reset the chisel on the tomb face, a foot to the right of the split. "Bust it," I said.

Patrick tore his gaze away from the distant ring of policemen scrambling toward us from the base of the hill.

"Bust it!" I yelled. "Swing, dammit, or we'll never know!"

He stared at me blankly for a moment, then he nodded, set himself again, and swung. But he was shaking. He struck a glancing blow that wrenched the chisel out of my hands and sent it spinning down the hill-

side. The force of the missed swing carried Patrick off his feet, slamming him into a stone marker. He crumpled, his face ashen, sides heaving, unable to rise.

I grabbed the maul, squared off, and swung at the crack, hammering at the door of the grave until it shattered, opening like a gaping mouth, and then I plunged inside, into the dust and the dark.

**B**radley Cunningham faced me through the wire mesh of the visitors' cell. His usual air of smug self-assurance was absent. He was sweating, and he seemed nervous and uncertain, a rare thing in a bureaucrat. And a bad omen.

"I've just come from a conference with the government prosecutors," he said. "I'm afraid the outcome of the hearing is a foregone conclusion, but—"

"They were waiting for us," I said. "How did they know?"

"That's not important now," he said, "what matters is—"

"It's important to me. Look, nobody's told me anything since they busted us three days ago. Now how the hell did they know?"

"I understand that Mr. Liang's wife—"

"That's impossible," I said flatly. "She barely speaks Chinese, let alone English.

She couldn't have known."

"Mr. Liang told her."

"He told her," I echoed stupidly.

"Your employer is an opium user," Cunningham sighed, "and apparently he talks in his dreams. She followed you out to the cemetery with some notion of protecting her husband. They found her Monday morning carrying a cross with an image of the Buddha on it. She'd been lost all night in the storm. She was raving, terrified. The guards weren't sure what was up, but they knew something was. And so they just waited."

I slowly shook my head. "What will happen to her?"

"I don't know. Perhaps nothing."

"What about Patrick?"

"Mr. Doherty will be returned to the work camp at Gaoshung to serve the remainder of his term. Plus ten more years."

"My God." I felt like I'd been kicked in the belly. It was a death sentence. There was a roaring in my ears and I could feel my chest constrict as I struggled to keep from crying for Patrick, and for myself. Cunningham's voice seemed to be coming from very far away. "I'm sorry," I said, "what did you say?"

"I ah, that is, the embassy, has interceded on your behalf. I feel . . . responsible, to some

extent, for your involvement in this. At the trial you'll be sentenced to twenty years, but it will be commuted to time served, and you'll be deported."

"Deported?" I felt a flood of relief, followed instantly by a rush of shame. Cunningham seemed to understand, nodding in sympathy.

"And the others?" I said tightly, not trusting my voice.

"Mr. Liang will receive twenty years as well, although with his financial resources, I doubt that he'll serve much of it. Mr. Chen—" He looked away, avoiding my eyes. "Mr. Chen hanged himself the night you were arrested. I'm sorry."

I took a deep, shuddering breath.

For a moment I could see Fred, grinning at me like

an idiot. Then the image swam. And dissolved.

"Thank you for coming," I said, getting to my feet. "I appreciate all you've done."

He stared up at me, making no move to leave, and I knew what he wanted.

"The police, ah," he cleared his throat, "the police told me they found you in a tomb that contained nothing of value. Why, Charlie? Why did you break into an empty tomb?"

There was an intensity in his gaze that seemed very familiar. I'd seen it a lot lately, in the eyes of my friends. And in the mirror. And I couldn't help smiling a little as I considered the possibilities. And how much I was going to tell him.

Apparently, I'd found a new partner.

FICTION

# Casey's Last Ride

by Robert Loy



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

24

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



---

---

**O**f course I coulda told Casey the stranger was not good looking mark material. As soon as he walked in and ordered a vodka martini, I spotted the guy for one of these serious, self-important type guys, you know. The kinda guy who don't take to bein' made the butt of a joke.

But I never tell Casey nothin'. Why bother is the way I look at it. I mean, c'mon, gimme a break, the guy's head's as hard as the Tokyo Times Sunday crossword. Leastways, it used to be.

Besides, I sell more drinks when he's working his shtick.

So anyhow, I sets the stranger's vodka martini down on the bar and—whoof!—from out of nowheres Casey pops up and slaps his mothly old derby hat over top of it.

"Hey! What's the big idea here?" says the guy. He was not amused, which is exactly what I figured he wasn't gonna be.

"How do you do, sir?" says Casey. "My name is Casey K. McVail. The K stands for King, believe it or not. And your name is?"

"My name is none of your business," says the guy.

"Oh, I see," says Casey, "a man of mystery, a man who likes to keep his cards close to his chest. Well, I'm a great res- pecter of a man's privacy. Why

don't I just call you Mr. X?"

"Why don't you just take a hike," says the guy. He grabs hold of Casey's derby hat with two fingers like he was fishing it out of a toilet or something, you know.

"Wait a minute." Casey grabs the guy's hand. "How much do you want to bet I can drink your vodka martini without moving—or even touching—my hat? You want to bet a thousand, a couple thousand maybe?"

The stranger was one of these guys who get quieter when they get mad, you've seen 'em. He was almost whispering now, his teeth kinda clenched up together.

"All I want," he says to Casey, "is to be allowed to drink my drink in peace and not be harassed by buffoons."

"Good plan," Casey tells the guy. "Sounds like an enjoyable way to spend an evening. And just as soon as you relieve me of a grand or two, you can do that and more. Why, just think, you'll be able to buy hundreds of vodka martinis and drink every one of them in peace, free from the buffoons. What do you say, Mr. X? Is it a deal?"

Mr X. sighed. You could tell it was starting to sink in on him that Casey is one of these guys whose religion don't allow him to take a hint, if you know what I mean.

"No, it is not a deal," says the guy, startin' out talkin' real quiet like I was tellin' you but endin' up yellin' almost, just like a normal person. "Now go away and leave me alone," he says. "I don't have a thousand dollars and if I did I wouldn't throw it away on some silly bet. What gives you the right to molest perfect strangers with such nonsense? Drink a martini without moving the hat—hah! What do you do? Stick a straw through the hat or something?"

I'm over here drying glasses the whole time, trying to pretend like I ain't listening, you know. But I nods to myself when I hear him say this 'cause I know it means he's taking a good sniff of the bait. Won't be long now if Casey plays him right, I says to myself.

"Straws! My dear Mr. X, that would be cheating," says Casey, rearin' back and lookin' as shocked as a guy who just heard his grandmother cussin' a bad dice roll in church. "I will not touch or in any way disturb the hat. I give you my word as a gentleman. If I do, I lose the bet. In fact, if it'll help put your mind at ease, I'll stand back here, five feet away. What do you say, Mr. X?"

Mr. X hesitated a minute, but he was hooked, you could tell.

"If I bet you," he says, "—and

I certainly will not bet any more than ten dollars—if I do so, will you go away and let me drink in peace?"

And Casey nods his head as he reels this guy in.

"Okay," says the guy. "It's a bet. I know you can talk through your hat, now let's see you drink through it."

I haven't seen Casey do this trick in a long time, so I puts down the glass I'm working on and turn around to catch the show. Better than half the guys are doing the same thing. Heck, there wasn't nothing else to look at, it being halftime on the *Monday Night Football*, you know.

It wouldn't'a mattered much if it'd been all tied up in the last couple minutes of the fourth quarter, though, really. For pure entertainment, Casey had those Chiefs and the Bengals beat seven ways from Sunday.

First he backs up a couple steps. Then he holds up his hand for silence along the bar—and he gets it, too; even old Warren Holiday puts a sock in his monologue about how bad his wife and the I.R.S. treat him. Then Casey closes his eyes and wrinkles up his forehead like he's concentrating real hard. Nothing happens for a few seconds, then his mouth kinda O's up, you know what I mean?, and he makes this

slurping kinda noise. He slurps for a good minute and a half, I reckon. Finally he opens his eyes and says to me—to *me* now, even though I've asked him fifty thousand times not to involve me in this stuff—anyway, he says to me: "My compliments, Archie. That was without a doubt one of the best vodka martinis I've ever tasted."

Old Mr. X can't believe it. He snorts real disgusted-like a couple times. He looks at Casey, he looks at the hat, he looks at Casey, and he shakes his head, like "No way," you know. Then he starts to say something, but he don't get no farther than: "Are you seriously trying to tell me—?" when he finally does what Casey and the boys along the bar had been waitin' for him to do. He lifts up the hat to see for himself if the vodka martini's still there or not.

It's there, of course, bigger than life. But it ain't there for long. As soon as Mr. X lifts up the derby, Casey zooms over to the bar, grabs the glass, and drains it with one gulp.

He wipes his mouth and then he holds out his hand to Mr. X.

"Ten dollars, please," he says.

"But—but—" says Mr. X. "But you said—"

"I said I wouldn't move the hat and I didn't," says Casey.

"You moved it," he says.

"But—but—" says Mr. X.

Then he looks up the bar and sees that most of the guys have more muscle than flab, some of 'em are holdin' pool cues, and all of 'em believe he owes Casey some money. So he grumbles some more, but he hauls out his wallet and throws a tenner at Casey.

"That was a trick," the guy says, but he might as well'a saved his breath. I mean, hell, everybody knew it was a trick.

"You're right," says Casey, "and I feel just terrible about taking advantage of a trusting soul like yourself. Here," he says, "here's your ten dollars back." And he holds it out for a second or two, but then he snatches it back.

"No. I'm sorry. Forgive me," he says. "I know you've got too much pride to accept this money I won fair and square as a gift, as charity."

But, I tell you, Casey was wrong there. The guy was going for that bill like those dolphins in the marine show go after a fish. I mean, he was jumping for it, you know what I mean.

Anyway, Casey says to the guy, "Instead of giving you this money back, which would be degrading to your dignity, we'll make another bet—"

"Uh-uh," says the guy, "no way."

"Wait," says Casey. "Listen, Mr. X, this'll be a bet you can't

lose. Just a formality really, a way for me to give you your money back without you having to sacrifice your pride. We'll think up something ridiculously easy, something along the 'Who's buried in Grant's tomb?' line, something like—oh, I don't know, you think of something—or how about—I got it!—I'll bet you double or absolutely nothing you can't tell me which president's picture is on this ten dollar bill you just gave me. Now that's a can't-lose bet if I ever heard one. What do you say, Mr. X?" And Casey kinda dangles the tenner in the guy's face, his thumb over the picture, don't you know.

Mr. X was off balance and it wasn't because of the second vodka martini I'd just made him—but you see what I mean about selling more drinks when Casey's open for business.

"Let me get this straight," the guy says. "It's double or nothing, and all I have to do is tell you what president's picture is displayed on that bill you just cheated me out of?"

"A most regrettable choice of words," says Casey—you remember how he used to love words like "regrettable"—"but essentially correct."

"Hah!" says the guy. "It's Alexander Hamilton! That's the Alexander Hamilton who was born in the British West Indies,

educated at Columbia College in New York City, first United States Secretary of the Treasury, killed in a duel with Aaron Burr! I, sir, happen to be a history major. Al. Ex. And. Er. Ham. Il. Ton," he says, drawing out each syllable like that. "Now give me back my money, you little chiseler."

Old Casey just shook his head real sad-like. "I'm afraid it's my money, Mr. X," he says while he's stuffin' the bill back in his pocket. "And you owe me another one just like it."

"What are you talking about?" the guy hollers. "Are you out of your mind? Any fool knows Alexander Hamilton's picture is on the ten," he says, and he hauls another tenner out of his wallet.

"There!" says the guy. He slams the bill down on the bar. "Alexander Hamilton, just like I said."

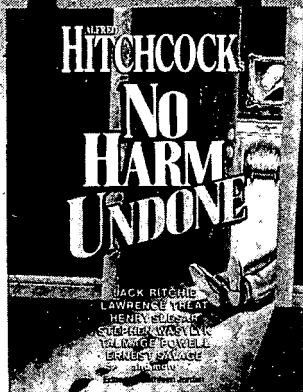
Casey moseys up to the bar, looks at the bill, picks it up, studies it real close for a minute, then: "Yep, that's Alexander Hamilton, all right."

"Of course it is," the guy says. "Now give me back my—"

"However," says Casey, "the bet wasn't about which British West Indies-born, Columbia-educated, destined-to-die-in-a-duel-with-Aaron-Burr, United States Secretary of the Treasury is on the ten dollar bill. The

# UNCOVER NEW WORLDS

With These New Anthologies from Longmeadow Press



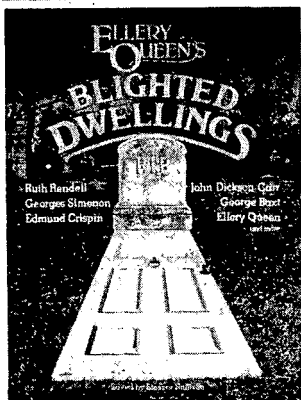
## Alfred Hitchcock's world of mystery and suspense

### Alfred Hitchcock's No Harm Undone

Edited by Cathleen Jordan

The master of suspense opens his files to compile 24 stories of mystery and intrigue, from some of today's most outstanding suspense authors: Lawrence Treat, Talmage Powell, Jack Ritchie, Henry Slesar and many others.

**\$7.95/#7533**



## Ellery Queen's world of ghostly beings

### Ellery Queen's Blighted Dwellings

Edited by Eleanor Sullivan

Renowned writers such as Ruth Rendell, Honore de Balzac, Lilly Carlson and others invite mystery fans to enter homes inhabited by the spectres of the mind, in this collection of 23 ghostly tales.

**\$7.95/#7536**

Pick them up today at your nearby Waldenbooks store. And while you're there, check out the Waldenbooks Mystery Club, a captivating book club with free membership a monthly newsletter and special savings for mystery and intrigue fans. Sign up today!

*America finds it at*  
**Waldenbooks®**

Books • Audio • Video • Magazines • Book Clubs • Special Orders  
Over 975 stores nationwide.

To order call toll-free 1-800-543-1300, Operator #390

(Alaska and Hawaii call 1-800-545-1000, Operator #390)

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SK271

bet was about which *president* is on it. The correct response is there is no president's picture on the ten," Casey says, and he stuffs this bill in his pocket with its twin. "Alexander Hamilton was never president," Casey says. "As a history major you ought to know that."

The guy just stands there, seeing how many different shades of the red end of the rainbow he can make his face turn. He says to me—and I swear he looks like he's going to cry—he says, "That's not right, is it? What he did to me, it's not right, is it?"

Well, to tell the truth, I think the guy's probably got a point. But, hey, you know how it is, a bartender has got to be impartial at all—and I mean *all*—times. You remember what happened when word got out about me votin' for Mondale, I 'bout went out of business. So I just look at the guy and shrug my shoulders like.

I thought the guy was going to explode, I really did. But he just mumbles something about Alexander Hamilton being a bastard—showing off some more of that history major stuff, I guess—and stomps on over to the old exercise bar where everybody throws their coats, you know.

"Wait a minute," Casey hollers. "Don't go."

The guy keeps goin'. Who can blame him, huh?

"Wait," says Casey. "I feel just awful about tricking you out of your money like this."

"Yeah, I just bet you do," says the guy.

"No, really. Let me make it up to you, please. Double or nothing. You name the bet. Anything. Bet me you can name your favorite color or bet me you can tie your shoes. Anything."

The guy says, "I have no intention of making any more bets with you. I intend to put on my coat and—"

"Okay, that's it. I'll bet you you can't."

"Can't what?" says the guy, interested in spite of himself, you know. I think that was his whole problem. He was too curious is what I guess I'm sayin'.

"I'll bet you you can't put on your coat by yourself," says Casey.

"You, sir, are a fool," the guy says to Casey. "A fool about to lose a twenty dollar bet. I've been putting on my coat by myself since I was a baby. Observe."

And he grabs up his coat and slips an arm through.

'Course at the same time Casey picks up his—or more likely, knowing Casey, somebody else's—coat and slips *his* arm through.



The guy slips his other arm through. Casey slips his other arm through.

The guy pulls his coat up tight around himself. Casey pulls his up tight.

The guy don't catch on till he and Casey are halfway buttonin' the things up.

Now this time the guy don't even look at the boys along the bar. Too bad for him really, 'cause they prob'ly woulda made for a more sympathetic jury this time. Every one of 'em's been taken for a ride or two by Casey, and they enjoy seein' somebody else try on the harness. They enjoys it for a little while, that is, just long enough to where's they can feel like maybe they weren't so stupid after all to be taken on one of these rides. But most of the guys were startin' to think old Casey was takin' a dead horse and drivin' it into the ground, you know what I mean?

But, anyway, like I says, the guy don't even look to see what the boys think about all this. He don't cuss or holler, either. Just gets real quiet like before, you remember how I told you 'bout this guy gettin' quiet when he's mad. Well, as he's handin' Casey the double sawbuck, he says, "Somebody ought to bounce you on your devious little head," but he says it so quiet can't nobody but Casey or me hear him,

and Casey's too busy trying to figure out how many scotch and sodas forty clams'll buy. Then the guy slams the door and he's gone.

Well, naturally I figure this is one guy who I ain't never gonna sell another vodka martini to, right? But, can you believe it?, he's back here the very next night.

Maybe he figures Casey won't be here, I don't know. I mean, how was the guy to know old Casey gets his mail delivered here just about? Well, old Casey he don't run over and throw the saddle back on the guy right off. But he keeps an eye on the guy—he's long since drunk up that forty bucks by now—to make sure he don't wander out of the pasture, if you know what I mean. The guy's on his second vodka martini when Casey mo-  
seys on over to him.

Well, hey, I go right for the mirror, to pull it off the wall, you know, in case chairs and bodies and all start flying. It's an antique, and I don't like to take chances with it. But the guy is real polite. Him and Casey shake hands and everything. Casey lies and says he was too drunk to know what he was doing last night. And the guy says, "Don't give it another thought."

They chew the fat for thirty minutes or so; the only con-

Casey's pullin' is gettin' the guy to pay for the drinks and, hey, for Casey, that's hospitality. But when I get back behind the bar from throwin' old Warren Holiday out—he says the jukebox stole his money and made a nasty crack about his haircut so he was gonna shoot it, had his gun out and everything—anyways, when I get back, Casey and the guy are talkin' 'bout bets again.

Casey says, "I bet you have a hole in your sock. In fact, I bet you have a hole in both of your socks." Guy says, "No, these socks are brand new." Casey says, "All right then, if there's no holes, how did you get them on your feet?"

Casey says, "I bet you I can jump higher than the bar." Guy says, "Okay." Casey jumps, I don't know, eight inches, a foot maybe. Then he turns and says—to the bar now—"All right, your turn. Jump!" Well, of course the bar don't move. Casey wins the bet.

Then he says, Casey that is, "I bet you I have more money in my pocket than you have." And I tell you the truth I mighta been crazy enough to take that bet myself, since I know Casey can't have more than a nickel or two in his pockets. Guy says, "Okay." Casey empties his pockets, says, "Here, I have forty-seven cents in my pocket,

you see, and you, well you have no money in my pocket."

So this same kinda stuff goes on for a while. I'm keepin' an eye on 'em, of course, keepin' an eye on my mirror too, 'cause this guy, he just ain't actin' right. He's laughin' and handin' over his money and everything like he was at Disneyland or someplace. That makes me plenty nervous, let me tell you, 'cause I mean, you can tell this guy just ain't like that really. He's a real serious kinda guy, you know what I mean. But I don't know. If he don't mind I don't mind. All I know is he keeps fillin' Casey's mouth with scotch and fillin' his hands with green.

Casey pulls a few more, most of 'em you prob'ly seen before, then he says to the guy, "I bet I can walk across this room, jump up on the pool table, drink this scotch and soda—through a straw—and walk back over here in ten seconds."

Guy says, "Go."

Casey borrows the guy's watch, looks at it till ten seconds've passed, then moseys over to the pool table, checks to see if anybody left a quarter in the change slot, jumps up, calm and cool like sips his drink through a straw, then walks back over to the bar.

"Ha, ha, that's a good one," says the guy, and he says it just

like that. I mean he says the "ha, ha," he don't laugh it, if you know what I mean. But he hands Casey another fin, and says, "Yes, that was a good one, all right."

Now I'm really nervous. Bein' taken for a ride is one thing. Handin' the guy the reins and complimentin' the way he whipped you in the backstretch is another. "You're very talented," says the guy.

Casey blushes. You know if there was one thing old Casey liked more than having a free scotch and soda in his hand and somebody else's money in his pocket, it's gettin' a compliment. He was a real sucker that way.

"Aw," he says.

"No, I mean it," says the guy. "And not just because of the way you think up all these great tricks—which I know takes a great deal of wit and intelligence—but also the way you jumped up on the pool table like that. Are you a professional gymnast?" asks the guy.

"No," says Casey, "but I try to stay in shape."

I have to laugh, 'cause unless you count arm-wrestling on the bar with Warren Holiday I've never seen Casey do any exercise. And even then he usually cheats by blowing in Warren's nose or cracking a joke or somethin'.

"Yeah, boy, you sure can think up some good jokes," says the guy. "Tell me, can you invent jokes on the spot? I mean, if I said I bet you can't stand on the ceiling, could you figure out a way to do it? Right then?"

"Well, sure," says Casey.

"Very well," says the guy, "I bet you five hundred dollars you can't stand on the ceiling." And he hauls a bill out of his wallet like I ain't never seen before. William McKinley was the guy whose picture was on it. I don't know if he was ever president or not.

The sound of a five hundred dollar bill hitting the bar gets everybody's attention. I mean, this place went from the usual Tuesday night hooting and hollering to bein' quieter than a congressman's conscience that fast. It ain't this quiet when it's closed. All eyes are on Casey, except mine, which are still on the five hundred dollar bill.

"You got yourself a bet, Mr. X," says Casey.

Now I don't know why he don't figure out some joke way to stand on the ceiling—you know, stand on the ceiling, but not *really* stand on the ceiling. Maybe he can't think 'em up as fast as he says he can. Or maybe that stuff about bein' a professional gymnast gave him the idea.

Anyways, what he does is he

takes one barstool and turns it upside down on top of another one, seat to seat, you know. So far, no big deal; I do the same thing when I sweep the floor. But then he takes another barstool, climbs up a little way, and balances this one on top of the upside-down one. You picturing this? He's got three barstools on top of each other, one upside-up, one upside-down, one upside-up.

Now he steps back and checks out his handiwork, tryin' to judge the distance from the top of the top barstool to the ceiling. He must think he's okay, 'cause he don't stand around but climbs up to where the bottom two stools' seats meet, stands there a second, then hoists himself up with his hands, throwin' his feet up over his head.

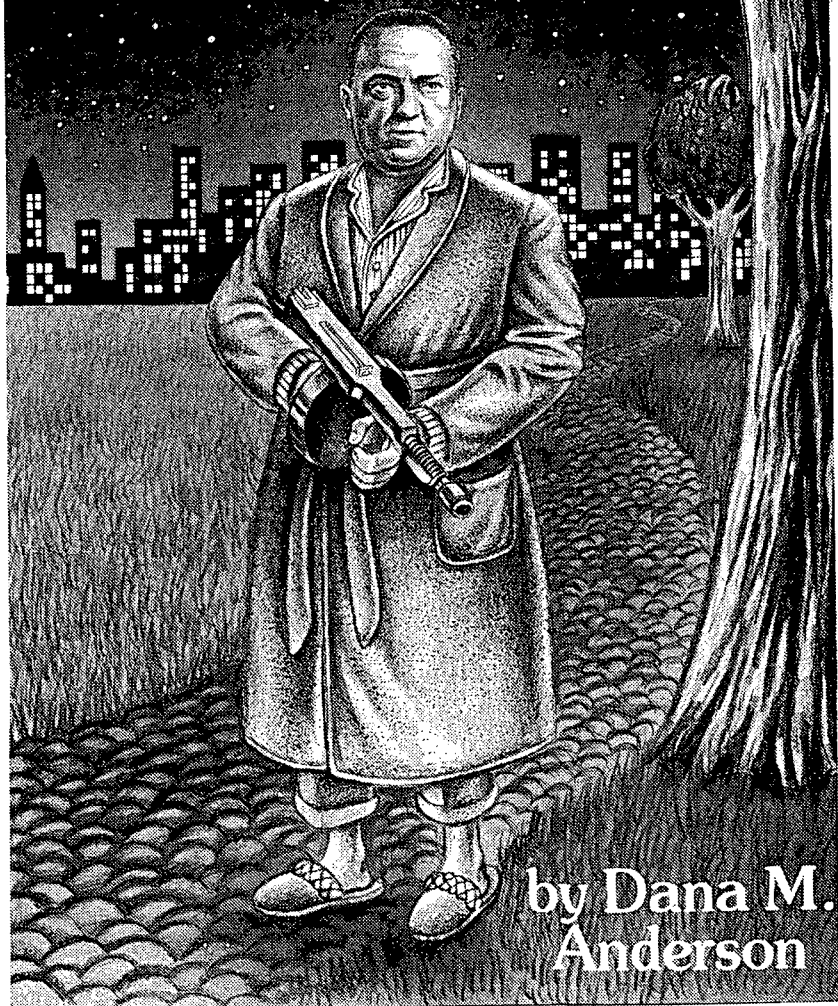
Everybody in the bar is holdin' their breath, and I mean that literally. If it'd taken old Casey any longer to find his balance, we'd've all been passed out on the floor with blue faces, I kid you not.

But Casey does it, don't ask me how. He's standin' up there on his head now, on the top barstool. He waits for the stools to stop swayin' and then he slowly, slowly straightens out his legs. Just about the time those of us on the ground are about to watch our eyeballs pop out of our head 'cause of lack of oxygen, Casey plants both of his feet on the ceiling.

"Darn!" says the guy. He rears his leg back and kicks the bottom stool clear across the room. "Looks like I lose again," he says.

FICTION

# The Return of the Late, Great J. Edgar Hoover



by Dana M.  
Anderson

“J. Edgar Hoover is dead,” James Bryant answered the breathless woman standing in the darkness on his stoop.

“Of course he is.”

“Do you understand what death is?”

“Look at me. Do I look any less sane than I did yesterday?”

“Well, some people might think it a bit extreme to be calling on your neighbors in your nightgown. It’s the middle of the night, Rosie.”

“Get technical on me, will ya?” Rosie Davis pushed past Jim and made herself at home on his couch. “I meant, do you think I’m ignorant? Of course I know he’s dead.”

He closed the door and leaned on the wall by the door. “Good, then you can understand why I doubt that J. Edgar Hoover told you to come trotting over here in your jammies to give me a message.”

“Well, he did. He came on line, so to speak, while I was sleeping.” Her normally husky voice rose an octave in exasperation as she curled her legs beneath her and tightened her silk robe at the neck. “He said it’s important that you be careful tomorrow. Something about Commies.”

“And J. Edgar Hoover told you that in a dream.” He’d always thought Rosie was a bit

strange, but he didn’t know about this aspect of her personality.

“No! He woke me up. Come on, would I come over here because of some dream?”

“And he said to tell me to watch out for Commies?”

“He said, and I quote, *Tell your idiot neighbor that the Commies are out to bust his butt. Tell him to watch his step tomorrow.*” She scowled up at him. “That’s the whole thing. Take it or leave it.”

“Okay, I believe you. I really do. And I promise to be extra careful at the office tomorrow.” Jim stuffed his hands in the pockets of his jeans and sat beside her on the couch. “But our spouses might not buy the explanation. And I know Doris would take a dim view of my entertaining you dressed as you are.”

“Ray would shoot you dead,” she giggled. “Probably both of us.”

“Ray isn’t a Communist, is he?”

“He’s a Republican.”

“Then we’re safe. Still, maybe you should go home now.”

“You’ll remember to be careful?”

“I promise.” He walked her to the door. “Just out of curiosity, do you talk to dead people often?”

Rosie’s cheeks imitated her



name and she looked at her feet. "Yeah, well, I do have a few regulars that stop by to chat, but this is a first for Mr. Hoover. I don't talk about it."

"No wonder. Goodnight, and thanks for the message."

"Goodnight, Jim. You won't tell anyone, will you? Ray says it's all a crock. He thinks I'm crazy."

"Well, we all know about Ray."

"Yes." She laughed. "Goodnight."

"J. Edgar," he said, closing the door. "Well I'll be switched."

**H**e didn't remember to be careful, not that it would have done any good. He did remember to have a private laugh over her nocturnal visit, but having laughed, he didn't feel it was right to take her seriously. So he made it a point to forget to be careful. But then it wouldn't have mattered anyway.

"Jim, could you step into my office?" Carl Jenson, his superior at Wetherby Electronics, said briefly as he passed Jim's desk. The normally verbose Jenson clipped the words off harshly, and didn't look at Jim as he spoke.

Jim followed the supervisor to his glass-walled room in the corner of the large quality control office.

A dark-haired man with nearly black eyes sat behind Jenson's desk wearing a severe expression on his narrow face. Jenson stood at the man's side, looking nervous. "This is Ralph Thomese," he said gloomily. "He's with central accounting."

"I've found some discrepancies here, Bryant," Thomese stated, his voice a nasal whine. "It seems that you did the preliminary quality control work on the new R-790 chip. You were sent five samples and found two of them to be defective. Yet only one of the defective chips was sent back down to the engineers for examination. Can you explain that?"

"No, I can't," Jim said. "There was only one bad one and I sent it back as usual. Nothing out of the ordinary."

"Possibly not for you, since you seem to have also neglected to return the R-600 chip you judged defective two months ago. Return delays are rather commonplace, I'm afraid, but not two months." Thomese bridged his fingers before his face and stared over them.

"I didn't have a defective 600," Jim protested. "They all tested out good."

"That's not what you noted on the paperwork, Bryant." He lifted a sheet from the desk. "You state here that one of the five was cracked."

"I did no such thing!" He took the paper from Thomese. There it was in black and white, complete with signature. "I don't understand this."

"I understand it, Bryant. But I don't understand how you expected to get away with it." He pursed his lips. "You'd better find those chips or come up with a damn good explanation."

Jim Bryant was not able to do either. He was able, however, to pack his things and go home on indefinite leave until he could.

"There was no way of preventing it, Rosie." Jim spoke glumly, elbow on the kitchen table, chin firmly planted in the palm of his hand. "Don't blame yourself."

"I could have at least got the name right," Rosie said morosely, stirring her coffee.

"Old J. Edgar probably had it wrong to begin with." He forced himself to laugh. "He's got Commies on the brain. Besides, it does sound a lot like Thomese."

"What do we do now?"

"We?" Jim tasted his coffee.

"I'm going to sit and worry about breaking the news to Doris when she gets home from work. I don't know about you."

"I'll get that old bastard back here and give him a piece of my mind," Rosie exclaimed. "He should have been more clear."

"Right, Rosie. Go practice your necromancy."

"This is getting to be a nasty habit with you." Jim stood in the entryway wearing the striped bottoms of his pajamas and rubbing a hand over his face sleepily. "Come on in, but be quiet. Doris had a bad evening after I told her about my sudden vacation and isn't sleeping very well. She had to take a pill."

"Sure, Jimmy." Rosie was excited beyond her normal effervescence and she actually bounced into the room, turning quickly as he followed. "I got him back!" she squealed, putting a hand to her mouth. "We had a nice chat," she whispered.

"You and J. Edgar." Jim dropped into his reclining chair and tilted it back. With any luck he could fall asleep and miss the rest of her report.

"Yeah. He gave me the whole story this time, and it's a hummer."

"Good."

"Wake up, turkey! I'm doing this for you, you know." She snapped one finger hard against his nose and sat on the arm of the chair. "That Thomese guy is pulling a fast one and you're the goat, buddy. The only way out is to catch him redhanded."

"Okay, Rosie." He shifted the chair upright, knocking her off

balance and into his lap. "Come on now!"

"Sorry."

"Jim? Is someone there with you?" Doris called tiredly from upstairs.

"Yes, dear. It's Rosie." He tried to push Rosie from his lap, but she clung to his neck giggling. "Get off!" he whispered hoarsely.

"Come on down, Doris," she shouted. "Jim and I are just necking on the couch."

"Oh, hell," he mumbled. At least she was fully clothed. It was his turn to be indecent.

"Sure you are, Rosie." Doris laughed. "Have fun."

"See," Rosie whispered in his ear. "Say something stupid and they go away happy. Now we're free to smooch all night long."

"Get up and get real, Rosie." But Jim smiled. Rosie was nothing if she wasn't entertaining. "Tell me about J. Edgar."

"Okay. He says that Thomese is selling those chips. That one chip, the R-600? He peddled it to General Telecorp for a tidy profit. They'll market it months ahead of you guys. Hoover says the 790 is going to Russia."

"Russia? The chip isn't that hot a property."

"The Russians don't know that."

"How does he do it?" Jim's skepticism hadn't lessened, but his interest was certainly aroused.

"The messenger who delivers your returns is in on it. She takes out one of the good ones and switches your report with one that Thomese makes up. It's simple."

"Just what have you been smoking, Rosie?"

"For crying out loud, how could I be making this up?" Rosie stood impatiently. "You're awfully ungrateful."

"I'm sorry, but no matter how nice it would be to blame it on old Hatchet-face, I just can't see it. The guy must be pulling down sixty, eighty grand. Why pirate chips?"

"Because of the girl, idiot! Julie! He needs a nest egg to leave the wife and kiddies and run off to Never Never Land with her."

"Wait a second." Jim's tired mind finally fastened on what she had been telling him. "I never told you the product numbers of those chips, did I? And you knew the messenger is a woman and her name is Julie. But you can't—can you?"

"I said I could, didn't I? Edgar and I had a lovely chat over coffee. He even complimented my coffee cake."

"I wish you had stayed home." Jim crouched at the knob of the apartment door and shook it slightly as he moved his Visa card in past the jamb.

"This isn't exactly a group project."

"Quit bellyaching and get the door open," she whispered. "The least I can do is be in on the kill."

"J. Ed probably got the address wrong."

"Come on, he apologized about the name mix-up. Give the poor guy a break. He was just ahead of the story was all."

"To hell with him and the imaginary horse he rode in on."

The bolt slid back and released the door. "Hot damn!" He smiled up at her. "At least I'll have a vocation when Wetherby cans me."

"Come on." She stepped past him into the dark apartment.

They had slipped out of their respective houses like children on an adventure, off to burglarize the apartment of Ms. Julie Decon, who, according to the late J. Edgar Hoover, was in possession of the missing R-790 chip. Jim fell in with the plan that Rosie had outlined primarily on the strength of his own desire that it all be true. Though he wasn't sure if he would enjoy conversing with the dead, he was glad to think somebody could. Now that they were inside, however, he wasn't so sure of the intelligence of their actions. Hoover had told Rosie that the apartment would be empty, and Jim could only

hope that he was more sure of his facts in death than he had been in life.

"It's in the kitchen," Rosie called, swinging the beam of her flashlight over the room.

"Here. This is the kitchen."

"Keep your voice down."

"Now, which one would you think is the silverware drawer?" She opened a drawer near the stove and closed it, moving to the next one. "Here it is."

"Okay, Rosie. The chip is pretty small, so look sharp."

"Maybe she taped it to the bottom of a serving spoon." She pulled out a handful of silverware and took it to the table.

"Don't clatter. Why didn't he tell you exactly where it is?" Jim lifted the tray of silverware out of the drawer and carried it over to her light.

"He wasn't here when she hid it," she hissed.

"This is stupid."

It wasn't in the drawer. Jim sat and glowered at Rosie as she replaced the silverware. Why did he let her talk him into this goose chase? He'd broken into a coworker's home just to help her tidy up her silverware drawer. Maybe they could do the dusting as well.

"On the drawer!" It was a harsh whisper, excited and hot on his ear. He looked around quickly. No one. "On it! Not in it!" the voice insisted.

"On the drawer!" Jim jumped from his chair with cold fire in his stomach and the hairs on the back of his neck standing at attention. "On it!"

He pulled the drawer out and flipped it over, sending knives and forks flying with a triumphant clatter. Sure enough, an envelope was taped to the bottom of the drawer.

"Make a little noise, why don't you?" Rosie aimed the light at the paper rectangle.

"Well, here it is," he sighed. "Now what do we do with it?"

"You take it off the drawer and hand it to me." Ralph Thomese spoke calmly behind them, and the kitchen light came to blinding life. "You're quite the detective." He stood in the doorway holding a small automatic pistol in one hand.

"The place was empty! Right, Edgar, baby?" Jim shouted at the ceiling. "I notice that you're not the one here when the going gets tough."

"Who are you talking to?" Thomese squinted at him.

"He's talking to Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, you boob," Rosie stated. "He's been onto your little game from the beginning."

"Who? This clown?"

"No," Jim said. "J. Edgar."

"Good." Thomese smiled. "It'll look better on the police report if the both of you are crazy as loons."

"Crazy enough to catch you. Crazy enough to find out where your girlfriend hid the chip." Jim watched the man and his gun, measuring the distance and feeling reckless. If he could create a diversion of some kind, he could take the gun away from him. Sure, he could. And he could fly with the application of a pinch of faerie dust. "How much are the Russians paying for it?" he asked, just to keep things moving.

"You know a lot, don't you?" Thomese waved the gun slightly. "Maybe you're beyond the point where I can call the police in on the matter."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Rosie said in a small voice. "We'd promise not to tell."

Thomese laughed. "Why don't you junior G-men just march out to the living room and lie face down on the floor. Okay?"

They did as they were told.

Thomese passed the time as he tied them up with small talk about his dreams and plans and general design for living after the big pay-off. He sounded like a man who had come up with one brilliant idea in his lifetime and was aching to tell someone about it. After selling several new designs to the competition over the past year, he made the deal with the Russians as the capper. He'd apparently entered into negotiations with

them simply as the ultimate proof of his brilliance. And the money wasn't bad, either.

"Take a little nap?" he suggested, rising after adding one last knot to the bale of twine he'd used on Jim's ankles. "I've got a couple of guys named Boris to talk to and then I'll be back for you. Catch you later."

Jim would have enjoyed making a snappy comeback, if he could have thought of one, but it was hard to talk with a pair of wool socks taped into his mouth so he let the opportunity pass. Instead, he scowled at Rosie, who lay beside him looking like a greedy chipmunk with her cheeks puffed out with a dish towel. He heard the door click shut quietly.

"Okay, boys, let's get into gear!" A cheery growl exploded above him and thick fingers plucked at the string around his wrists. The hairs on his neck started dancing again. "We'll have to step quick to catch that pinko bastard in flagrante delicto, but by God we'll do it."

Jim's hands were suddenly free, then his feet, and he pushed himself up to his knees and tore the tape away from his face. He wasn't ready to face his benefactor just yet.

"I knew you'd come!" Rosie shouted, jumping to her feet. "You haven't met Jim yet, have you?"

"I know him." The voice was gruff, authoritative, and sounding quite pleased. "He's that pinko neighbor of yours. Voted Democrat in the last three elections and belongs to the ACLU. I've got his number."

Jim turned to find himself facing a bulky man with the familiar bulging eyes and the determined expression of a crazed bulldog stamped on his kisser. He was wearing a silk bathrobe belted tightly around his thick waist. The cuffs of his silk pajamas stopped two inches above the comfortably worn slippers, exposing scrawny ankles as white as fish bellies.

"Mr. Hoover, I presume," Jim said stupidly, extending his hand.

"Damn right, buster." Hoover declined to shake hands. "Let's shake a leg."

"See? I told you I knew J. Edgar Hoover," Rosie whispered as they followed him out the door.

"All right, all right." Jim was laughing like the village idiot. "But why's he wearing his pajamas?"

"I'm dead, mister," the head G-man called over his shoulder. "Who the hell cares how I dress?"

"G"ot them in our sights now," Hoover exclaimed gleefully from his position behind an oak tree at



the edge of the city park. Jim and Rosie were huddled together behind a bush, shivering in the cold as they watched Ralph Thomese wait on a bench within the city-locked forest.

"Come on, Edgar. Have you seen the customers yet?"

"They've just entered the park," answered the deceased.

"I'm ready." Rosie had started the evening fully prepared, armed with a 35mm camera and fast film on Hoover's instructions. Now she held the camera to her eye and focused it on Thomese.

"That's the spirit, team." Hoover spoke like a high school football coach just before the homecoming game. "We'll get photographic evidence. Nail them to the wall. Then we'll go in swinging. We'll hit them so hard they'll think we brought the Marines. Damn, this is great!"

"We should call the police," Jim groused. "And what about the FBI? Can't you let the old gang in on the glory?"

"Those pansies?" Hoover scoffed. "They knocked the guts out of the bureau since I ran the place. It would take them a week to get warrants, for crying out loud. No, we can take them."

"You haven't had this much fun since your funeral, have you, Eddie?"

"Got me there, boy. I haven't been getting out enough lately,

but that's going to change. Yes sir, it's great to get back into the field."

Jim shifted to look up at him. Hoover stood like Admiral Nelson at the helm, his robe fluttering in the breeze and his belligerent jaw thrust into the wind. Jim could see how he had managed to bully a succession of presidents. The old duffer looked downright carnivorous.

"There!" Hoover barked.

Rosie began snapping pictures as Jim turned back to see Thomese talking to a couple of hefty fellows in dark overcoats. They spoke for a minute, then exchanged a briefcase for the small packet. Thomese took from his pocket.

"Now!" J. Edgar ran, duck-like, toward the men as his two protégés scrambled after him. "Hold it right there, you Commie bastards!" he shouted.

The men froze for a second, then started to run, scattering.

Hoover disappeared, popping up beside one fleeing Russian to plant a right cross on his jaw. It was an old man's punch, however, and the man merely stumbled slightly and ran the other way. Undaunted, Hoover disappeared to come out swinging at the other Russian, then Thomese, then the first one again, until he had them running into each other trying to get away from their attacker.

By that time, Jim and Rosie

had entered the fray, doing the best they could with their mortal fists. I'll bet it doesn't hurt his pudgy little hands to punch a guy in the face, Jim thought ruefully as he recoiled from the shock of knuckles on cheekbone. His target responded in a most ungentlemanly manner by thrusting a fist the size of a concrete block against Jim's face, knocking him on his butt on the cold ground.

"Get up, Jimmy!" Hoover shouted, pulling Rosie away from Thomese, who had been dragging her around in a circle by her mane of auburn hair.

"That hurts!" She kicked Thomese soundly on the shin.

Hoover popped over to round up the Russians again and Thomese took the opportunity to grab another handful of hair and start swinging the woman like a hammer thrower working on a new record. Jim was up and running to put Thomese down for the count when a gunshot cracked and a bullet zipped past his ear like a supersonic bumblebee. He dived, hitting Thomese and bringing the three of them down in a pile.

"Enough!" One of the customers pointed a gun at them while the other turned in circles, looking for the absent Hoover. "Where is the old man?"

"What old man?" Rosie called, her voice muffled by Jim's arm over her mouth.

"No more games. You will purchase the farm for sure if you try anything comical."

"Speak English, geek," Rosie shouted.

"I do not require your lip," he said. "I will be perfectly content to shoot your brains out, young lady." He leveled the gun at them. "Where is the grandfather who does your fighting for you?"

"Over here, Commie pig!" Hoover spat the words out like bullets in his raspy voice. "Eat lead, comrade!"

Jim caught sight of the director stepping out of the foliage holding something long and dark in his stubby hands. He didn't have time to comprehend what it was before it explained itself by burping out a loud series of reports and a flickering tongue of flame.

The Russians hit the dirt as Hoover swung the gun and the bullets went whing, zing, ping-ing around the clearing. Thomese yelped on top of their pile and started whimpering and trying to crawl to the bottom. Jim held him securely in place as a shield while the unfriendly ghost stood bouncing around on the butt end of a vintage Thompson. He paused a second, then laughed maniacally and sprayed the area again.

"Had enough?"

"Da!" they shouted in unison.

Thomese moaned agreement.

"Get up, children," Hoover laughed. "I believe that will bring the bulls soon enough."

As far as Jim could tell, Hoover had only succeeded in scratching Thomese's shin and chewing the hell out of a bunch of perfectly innocent trees, but it was enough for their foreign visitors. They stayed firmly planted on their bellies on the frozen ground, hands clasped to the backs of their heads.

A siren wailed in the distance.

"You know what to tell the boys in blue." Hoover threw his arms around Jim and Rosie. "I'll leave you to take care of the paperwork. Damn, that was great!"

"A little piece of Heaven," Jim mumbled. But then it had been fun in an odd sort of way.

"You're good eggs," Hoover proclaimed. "Both of you. Handled yourselves like pros under fire. Like genuine, professional G-men. We'll have to do it again someday."

"Sure, let's make a date for Tuesday, shall we?" Jim said. "But before you go riding off into the sunset, could you tell us how to explain all these bullet holes?"

"Should I do your breathing for you, too?" he scoffed. "God gave you a perfectly healthy brain to think up lies with. Use it." He let go of them and picked

up his Tommy gun, cradling it under one arm. "Next time you bake one of those struesel cakes, I'll be around for coffee, Rosie," he said, winking. "Bye now."

With that, he turned and popped out of sight.

"See you, J. Edgar," Rosie called.

Jim and Rosie faced charges of discharging a firearm within city limits, but the case fell apart without the machine gun the three conspirators insisted had been used against them. Nobody ever came up with a good explanation for the sixty or so rounds of ammunition that had been used to massacre the city's trees. But they didn't care much about trees once the film was developed and the Feds did their thing.

After several network newscasts, the cover of *Time*, and a couple of good citizen medals, things settled back to normal. Almost normal, anyway.

One night in late February, Ray Davis was awakened by the sound of laughter in the kitchen. He slipped into his robe and went to investigate. Seated at the table, he found his wife and their strange neighbor eating cake and drinking coffee.

"It's three A.M. What the hell is going on down here?" He

squinted against the light at the three crumb-dusted plates, the three half-filled cups of coffee.

"I'm making out with your wife, Ray," Jim Bryant smiled.

"Sure. Who else was here?"

"J. Edgar Hoover, dear." Rosie smiled sweetly. "Would you like to join us? Eddie was telling us about Dutch Shultz."

"No thanks, Rosie. Good-night."

He shuffled out of the

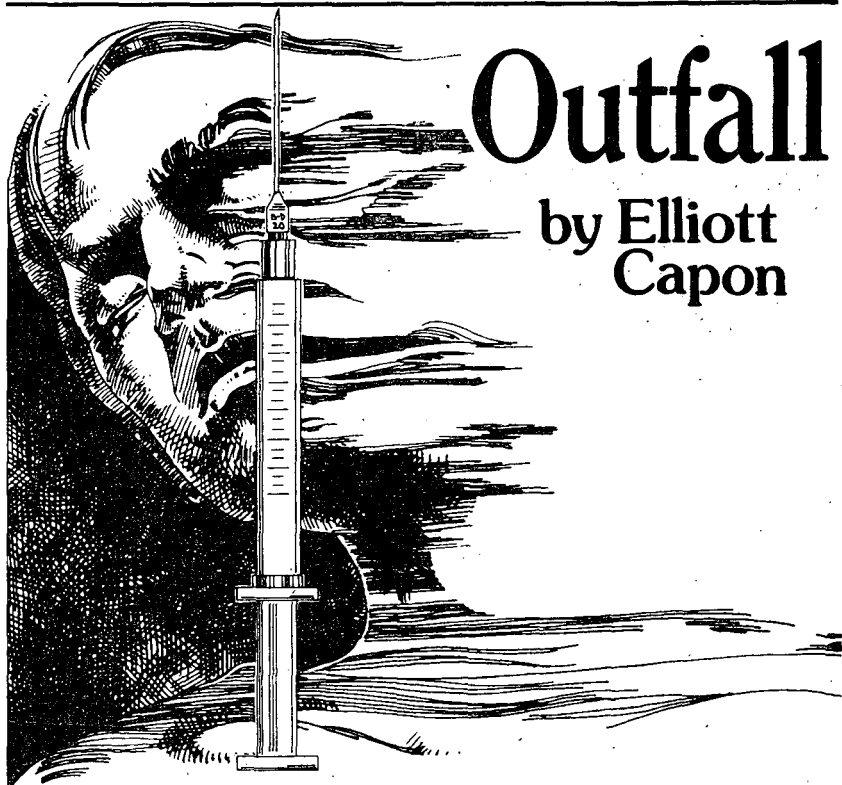
room, yawning. A couple of Mad Hatters having a tea party, he thought, they're both entirely insane.

Maybe it was a trick of his tired imagination, but halfway up the stairs he could almost swear he heard a third voice speaking in the gruff tones of an old man. No, it was just his sleepy mind. But what had the imaginary voice said?

"Tell them something stupid and they go away happy."

*Important Notice to Subscribers: All subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 1932, Marion, O. 43305. For change of address, please advise 6 to 8 weeks before moving. Send us your current mailing label with new address.*

FICTION



# Outfall

by Elliott  
Capon

**T**he reason I was home during the day in the first place was that I had had an accident in the truck, never mind what. After the bumps and contusions had gone, what I was left with was a bad back. I could walk, get around and everything, but sitting for long periods of time was excruciatingly painful—and when you drive an interstate rig, sitting for long periods of time is sort of necessary. So here I was home for an indefinite period, visiting the chiropractor three times a week. Between worker's comp, the union sunshine fund, and the insurance settlement (someone forgot to secure a tire properly), me and my wife Patty were doing all right for the short run, and they said I'd be back at work in about six or eight months or so.

The trouble was, I was going nuts just staying at home all day, and Patty said I was driving her nuts. Since the one thing I was

capable of doing was walking, I decided to kill two birds with one stone and explore the neighborhood.

We lived in Petersburg Township—and since there's probably a dozen Petersburgs in each of the forty-eight continental states, there's no chance that you'll find out which one. I took my reliable Hagstrom's Map of XYZ County and plotted a walking tour that would, over six months, let me walk up and down every street in town. Petersburg covers about thirty square miles—true, a lot of it undeveloped—and that gave me plenty of new things to see and new streets to walk. No, I didn't stay away from home for six months—I'd either start from the house or take the car ten or fifteen minutes to a jumpoff point, then walk for four or five hours.

So that's how I found it. No, let me go back a bit. Patty worked three days a week in a law office not too far from the house, so what she'd do was Xerox for me the page of the Hagstrom's I was planning on covering that day, and I'd pencil out the streets as I covered them. So this one day—it was July, the first day of moderate temperature after a vicious heat spell—I was walking up Middle Street, in the Waterview section of town. Someone with a sense of humor had named it Waterview because it was on the bay side of the town (I think I just eliminated twenty-five of the forty-eight states; no matter) and most of the streets just sort of dead-ended on the marshlands. There was water, sure, if you looked out far enough, or if you lived in Dockside Estates, but here there were just six foot weeds, mosquitos, and field mice. New houses stood here and there, the owners hoping that in ten years or so developers would fill in the marsh and hundredtuple their property values, but the neighborhood was mostly older, smaller, upper-lower middle class houses.

So anyway, here I was walking down Middle Street, planning on going to the end and taking a right on Oliver Street, which made a soft right-angle curve back around and onto North Road, which was the street I had walked up to turn onto Middle. Follow me? Nothing went through—everything just abutted the wetlands.

So I'm halfway up Middle when here's this street on my left, at a right angle to Middle: Washington Street, it says, and on the pole holding the street sign is a little hand-stenciled wood sign that says OUTFALL AUTHORITY and an arrow pointing up Washington.

I pulled my Hagstrom's Xerox out of my pocket and checked it and there's no Washington Street off Middle. Even though it's the newest map, it's still drawn off town maps that have to be four or five years old, so lots of newly developed streets—farms turned

into condo developments and suchlike—don't show. But this didn't look like no condo development.

Middle Street had a handful of old, old houses, with two new ones toward the corner of North—the "land" side, if you will. Down the end, toward Oliver, I could see a small concrete and paving company with a few trucks. As I looked up Washington, I could see that it was just a hard-packed dirt road (not unusual along the bayside) with six-foot-plus weeds, or willows, or whatever they were, along both sides. And it curved to the right, so I couldn't see more than fifty feet down it.

Okay, as if that wasn't enough to pique my curiosity—why a new street if there was nothing on it?—what was an "Outfall Authority"? Yesterday, three blocks to the south, I had discovered the Petersburg Township Sewerage Authority, and that, sure, that made sense—but "Outfall"? This, as the saying goes, I hadda see for myself.

I started walking down Washington. In less than a minute the street had disappeared behind me and I was alone in a little world of weeds and dirt. There were tire tracks, and an occasional beer or soda can in the weeds. I even saw an empty condom box.

After about six or seven minutes of walking, the road curved again, and there, off to my right, was this building.

Let me explain this better. What appeared to be Washington Street—the hard-packed dirt road—extended straight before me, curving off again into the weeds some distance ahead. I didn't have to look at the map to know that there was no place for it to go. That area was totally undeveloped—nothing but solid bayside marsh until it hit the bay proper. The old, unused fishery was a good mile to the left, and what remained of the commercial fishing business—the docks and lobster boats—were near that. There was no need for a road to nowhere . . . yet someone had cleaned one out. To my right was an expanse of blacktop maybe two hundred feet long that ended in a barbed-wire topped fence that seemed to take in a nice piece of property—all, in dire contrast to the rest of the neighborhood, very nicely grassed. A small sign by the locked gate in the fence read N.C.R.C. Now you'd think, as I did, that the Petersburg Township Outfall Authority's sign would say P.T.O.A., or P.O.A. at least, wouldn't you?

I saw that the blacktop extended through the gate and expanded into a parking lot for about twenty cars, seven of which were there. Immediately adjacent to that, say a thirty second walk from the gate, was a building. Well, *the* building.



It wasn't more than three stories tall, but you couldn't see stories. I mean, the whole thing was shaped, well, it was sort of shaped like the U.N., like a big railroad car stood on end with thousands of green glass panes instead of bricks or siding. I could see a front door, glass, like in a store, and that was it. It was small. A small, modern building, a township (or state?) authority basically here in the middle of nowhere, with a good fence around it. It sure wasn't a prison farm or anything; the only person I saw was a guy in the distance sitting on a riding mower.

Well, I wondered for a few minutes, then shrugged and continued my scheduled walk.

But it wouldn't let go. What, first, was an "Outfall Authority"? Why was it fenced? Where did that new street lead? I had gone to bed at midnight, but I swear I lay awake till after two until I decided to find out. (stroke of genius!) by calling Town Hall the next day.

I waited till nine thirty, till everyone'd had their coffee and doughnuts, and I called the main number I found in the yellow pages for Petersburg Township. I told the woman who answered the phone that I was looking for some information on the Outfall Authority. She told me to hold on, and then another woman answered the phone.

"Mayor Gentili's office," she said.

The mayor! Geez, I hadn't wanted to talk to the damn mayor! "Uh, excuse me," I said, "my call was transferred to you. I don't know if you can help me."

She had the politeness to chuckle a little. "Well, I'll try."

"Uh, yes, I'd like some information on the Outfall Authority, uh, what it is, what it does, if you can give it to me."

There was a pause of several seconds. I'd almost started saying hello when she came back on. "Can I ask the reason for your question?"

Instead of saying, "Nunnayer business," like I wanted to, I figured she was polite so I could be, too. "Uh, yes, I was walking around the neighborhood yesterday and I found it, and I was curious as to what it is."

"I see." There was another pause, shorter. "Can I have your name and address, please?"

I had a great flash of insight, or intuition, that the reason she wanted my name and address was to make sure that I really lived in the town, that she wasn't going to give information to an out-of-state reporter or to Mike Wallace's *60 Minutes* staff. So, 99.9%

as a joke, I gave her my next door neighbor's name and address: "Yes, Mickey O'Shaughnessey, 94 Lipton Avenue."

"Thank you, Mr. O'Shaughnessey," she said. "We have brochures prepared describing the township's authorities and departments, and I'll drop one in the mail for you this afternoon."

I got out the "He" of "Hey, you don't have to do that, just give me a one-sentence explanation," before she hung up. Okay, so I went on with my life.

When I came back from that afternoon's walk (I did the Michael's Falls area) I saw three gas company trucks, a police car, my wife, and Mickey's wife Emily in front of their house. I asked them what was up.

"Gas leak," said Patty. "They found it with instruments and traced it to Emily's basement. They have to evacuate, get the kids and get out."

Emily, as you can imagine, was in some confusion. "I don't know what to do," she said.

A young cop came over. "Ma'am, you'll have to get out of here soon, and you folks, too. The gas company says there's a real danger here."

Mickey was at work, so Emily just threw the kids in the car and threw some stuff in after them and called Mickey and went to her sister's about an hour north of here.

And at about ten thirty that night, their house blew up.

Not bad enough to destroy the houses on either side (like mine) but just enough so that if their insurance had a replacement value clause they'd be able to rebuild. In a year or two.

Sure, *now* I can put two and two together. But not then.

About a week later, when the upset and the turmoil had somewhat died down, I remembered good old Washington Street again. It occurred to me that even though we had arranged with the mailman to get the O'Shaughnesseys' mail for them, six business days had passed and no brochure for him had arrived from Town Hall. So that day I decided to walk all the way to the end of Washington Street and see what was there.

The Outfall Authority building was as quiet and still as it had been the last time, when I walked past it and into the weeded silence.

The street curved and twisted and snaked, so that you could never see more than fifty or sixty feet in front of you. I walked for about twenty-five minutes until I rounded yet another curve and right there in front of me was the bay and sticking into the bay

was a small dock. Unlike the other docks along the shore, which had been built when this was a booming fishing center, this one seemed brand new, constructed of plastic and metal and fiberglass, and not slimy, rotting wood.

There was a boat tied up to it—I don't know boats, but it looked like one of those chartered fishing boats that go out from Lambs-head Bay—and a jeep parked next to it, and two guys leaning against the jeep, chatting. They were both no more than thirty, wearing jeans and polo shirts, but neat, very clean. They both started when I rounded the curve and they saw me, and the bigger one, the blond, threw down his cigarette and I saw that he put a hand on the inside of the jeep door. I guessed it was up to me to say something.

"Hi," I said, with a big friendly smile, 'cause I didn't know if I should be scared or not. "Didn't know there was anybody living here."

The big one didn't smile, but the smaller one (smaller—he was six two at least) did, and said, "I guess you didn't realize this is private property."

I felt myself blushing, which I still do when I'm embarrassed. "I didn't know. I mean, there's no sign or nothing. . . ."

"No harm done," the smaller one said. "Eventually, we're going to put up NO TRESPASSING signs."

"Can I ask who owns it?" I asked, 'cause I figured if it was a developer or something, property values were going to skyrocket and I wanted to know.

"It's private, that's all," said the big one. "Now would you mind leaving?"

"Hey, sure, no problem," I said, and backed away a little, then turned and scurried, 'cause now I was scared 'cause I realized these guys were dealing drugs capital D capital RUGS, and I wanted no part of nothing to do with nobody delivering drugs to our fair state. Let the Coast Guard worry about that.

I was about fifteen minutes down the street on my way back, hidden from the sight of all men, when I noticed a little nest of field mice on the side, just into the weeds. They were so cute I sat down and watched them for about a half hour. This was so you understand I got back to the Outfall building in an hour, instead of zooming past it in twenty minutes.

And there was that jeep in the parking lot.

So unless the township was keeping property taxes down by selling cocaine, I had the wrong theory.

A barbed-wire topped fence. A boat. Private property. No information. Mickey's house. N.C.R.C.

There was something rotten in the land of Petersburg.

Now understand this: I'm not an adventurer or a dashing man-about-town or a private detective. Yeah, I did a stint in 'Nam, but in the quartermaster corps; I got shelled a couple of times but I never fired a shot in anger, or even self-defense. I never did anything particularly heroic in my life and I wasn't no Remington Steele living any real-life fantasies. *But and but*. There was something absolutely fishy about this Outfall thing. I was drenched by questions, obsessed by the whole situation. But I think the catalyst was I knew—I never admitted it to myself consciously, but I just *knew*—that the O'Shaughnesseys had their house blown up not *by* me, of course, but *because* of me. I think I thought it would have justified their loss somehow if I uncovered what was going on.

Yeah, it looks nice and clear and well-thought-out on paper, but I sweated for four days before I decided what I was going to do, or at least half-decided: I was going to bop over that fence and see what was what. If I could get inside the building, great; if not, I could at least look through the door. I had to.

I didn't want to do it in the pitch blackness of night, so after a supper I couldn't touch I drove Patty to her weekly bingo game and then drove right over to Middle Street, where I parked the car behind one of the concrete company's trucks and unstealthily, like I lived on the block, walked to and up Washington. It was about a quarter to eight, the sun was just starting to think about setting; plenty of light to see but certainly after government office hours. I saw that the only thing in the parking lot was that jeep: probably whoever had it assigned to him wasn't allowed to take it home.

In the twilight I could see that a light was left on behind the front entrance, and one or two behind the windows, but no spotlight or floodlights or anything, as if they didn't want anyone to know the building was there.

My mouth was dry and my heart was pounding in my ears, but scaling that fence was something I had to do, and after all was said and done, it was easy. I did stick myself on the inside of my thigh as I swung my leg over the top of the barbed wire and my back complained when I hit the ground on the inside, but all told I felt like I was finally doing something.

There was no reason to skulk, but I did tread quietly as I approached the front door. It looked into a hall, a lobby, like you'd see in any neat apartment building: small, featureless, two doors

facing each other, unmarked, in the walls at right angles to the plane of the front door, and right opposite me, an elevator. The elevator had one of those things over it that told you what floor it was on. As I expected, there were the numbers 1 and 2, but I got a little shock that like ran down my body and into my gut when I made out B1, B2, B3, and B4, all to the left of the number 1, meaning—

Something hard pushed against my left temple. I turned my head a fraction and saw the big blond in the background, behind a large pistol. My legs turned to Jell-o.

"I told you this was private property," he said.

He pushed a button I hadn't noticed on the doorframe and one of the doors inside the lobby opened and the first guy who had talked to me came over and unlocked the front door. Blondie pushed me inside and, without saying anything, shoved me into the elevator. The other guy got in and pushed B3 and as I felt the elevator descend I sincerely regretted ever having been born. Whatever I had done, I had done it bad.

The elevator smoothly slid to a stop and the door opened on the set of *Star Trek*. We were in a hall, long and antiseptic, with doors on each side, six, to be exact. Nobody was funding this with the fifteen hundred bucks a year I paid in property taxes. I didn't know what this was, but I knew that my gut hurt something awful.

Blondie's gun nudged me forward and down the hall to the fourth door on the right. The other guy gave a perfunctory knock and opened the door. Blondie shoved me inside and followed me in, shutting the door behind him.

The room looked like a doctor's office, but the kind of doctor's office you see in nightmares when you're a kid, you know? A table covered with a painfully white sheet under a fluorescent fixture; trays and tables with all sorts of strange-looking instruments; strange machines like EKG things against the wall. And then, of course, the "doctor."

I called him that because he was wearing a white smock and I could see he had on a tie. Like the other two guys, he wasn't very much past thirty, if he was past it at all. Without any words from Blondie or the doctor, but lots of help from the gun, they made me lie down on the table, on my back, and put straps around my ankles, wrists, and forehead, securing me as nice as you please. I was so scared I had no voice; if I'd had one, I think I'd've started to cry.

The doctor picked up a manila folder and stood over me where I could look up at him. He flipped through it for a moment. "You're

a troublemaker, Mr. Firestone," he said. "You were warned to stay away from here. Twice. Once by Mr. Hyde," he indicated Blondie with a nod, "and once by what happened to your neighbors. Which was perhaps the only clever thing you've done. But now," he sighed, "we have to fix things for good."

I've seen enough bad movies to know I was entitled to some kind of explanation, but it still took me several tries before I could get my lips and tongue to cooperate with me. "What is this place?"

The doctor had stepped out of my vision, but he came back wielding a hypodermic needle. "Fair question," he said, and he swabbed my arm and stuck me. I hardly felt it.

"You are in treatment room seven of the Northeast Criminal Rehabilitation Center, one of six such centers operated by the Outfall Authority of the U.S. Justice Department." Any idiot could see that I was absolutely confused, so he continued. "There are people, Mr. Firestone, who, by their behavior and activities, have no place in civilized society. These people are deemed to have 'fallen out' of society; hence, in 1968, the Justice Department created the Outfall Authority to see that these people are put back."

"H . . . h . . . how?" I whispered.

"By making certain changes in the brain," the doctor continued, so matter-of-factly that my whole body went cold, or maybe it was the shot. "Electrodes are implanted in the proper sections of the brain, and the correct charges applied, so that all previous memories, as well as all impulses toward antisocial behavior, are eradicated. The subject is then indoctrinated with a new name, a new memory, a new life, and is relocated—sometimes by boat, as you've discovered—as a fresh, viable member of American society."

For some reason, it occurred to me to whisper "fascism," or something like that, I don't remember.

"Not at all, Mr. Firestone. Only the worst, most intractable criminals are so treated. For instance there was the one, ah, Becker, or Beckman, in 1969, who killed eight people in Louisiana by carving them up with butcher's utensils, or in, um, I think it was in '71, one I read about, Wilson, Wilkins, something like that, a California resident who committed nine or ten rapes and then put his victims' eyes out with a penknife. When they, and people like them, are caught, they are sent to CRC's for rehabilitation. And now they are useful, happy, productive citizens."

"Why . . . why me?" I croaked.

He consulted his folder again. "Well, Mr. Ted R. Firestone, 92 Lipton Avenue, wife Patricia née Penney, Social Security number

so-and-so . . . I needn't go on. As you can imagine, this is a very secret operation, and unfortunately, you stuck your nose where it didn't belong, and we can't have that. They'll find your car in the Cheektowaga River, right near the broken guard rail on the Ridge Avenue bridge, but you, my friend, are going to wake up a different man with a different name and a different life in a different state."

He nodded and Blondie came over, wheeling one of those machines on a table. I tried to say NO!, to squirm, or something, but whatever he had shot me up with had rendered me immobile. By straining my eyes all the way to the side, I could see the doctor take two incredibly long needles attached to the machine by wires. He leaned over me; I can remember, iconoclastically, looking up his nose.

"Now just relax, Ted, this'll be over quickly."

He stuck the needles into my temples.

PAIN.

The pain was unbelievable. The pain was beyond description. I had always believed that when pain hit a certain threshold, you passed out. The part of the brain they stabbed obviously was in control of shutting off the fainting reflex. The pain, the pain, the pain, for a million years and more. Then, finally, blackness.

I'm in another state now, one without a coastline. I have a new name. I'm seeing a couple of women and I work in a supermarket and my back doesn't bother me much. But there's just one little loose end to tie up.

I said that all three guys I saw at the N.C.R.C. were young; they were probably still in junior high or high school when Sammy Lee Wilkerson was brought into the West Coast Criminal Rehabilitation Center for treatment, so that's why they didn't recognize me. And another thing they didn't know was that while one outfall treatment wipes out your memory, a second one reverses the effect, restores it. Restores *everything*.

I've got a date with Margie Marra tonight. She's a divorcee, a nurse who wears her uniform too short and drinks too much and has disgustingly loose morals. Do I have a surprise for *her* tonight.

Oh, yes, I remember who I was, and I remember going through outfall treatment twice. I remember that pain twice.

Oh, oh, yes. I remember.

With a vengeance.



# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



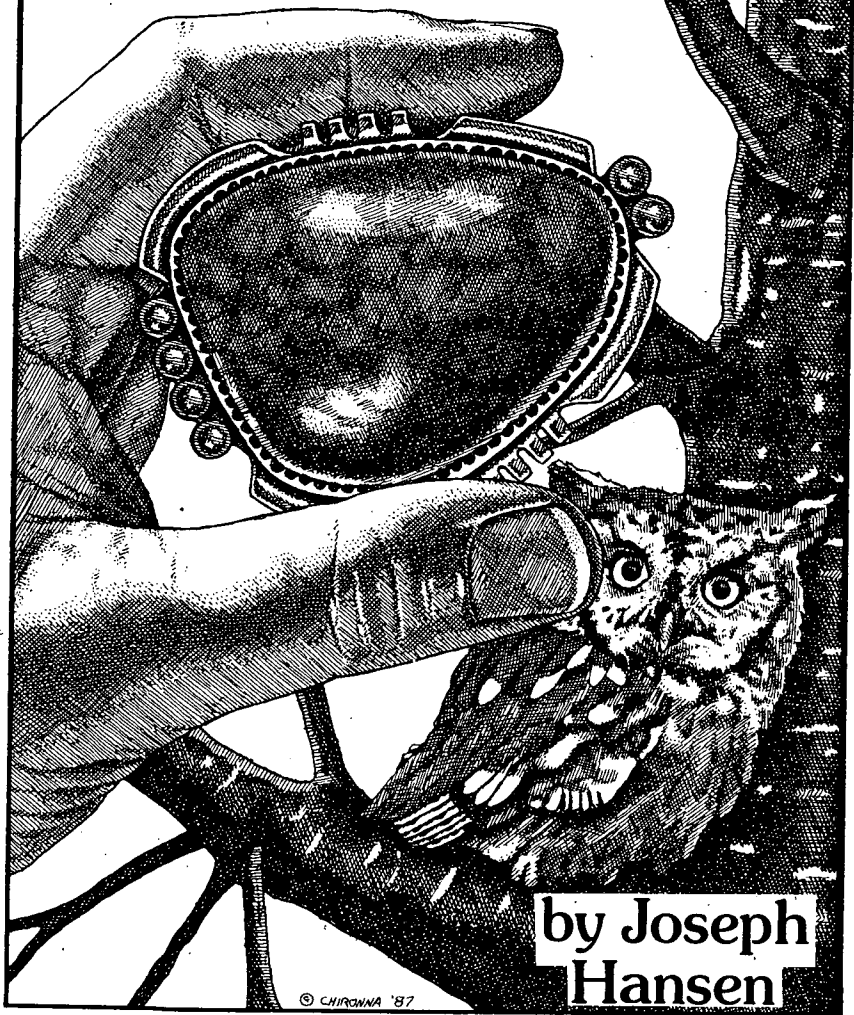
© 1953 Henri Cartier-Bresson/Magnum

Tradeoffs . . . We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less—and be sure to include a crime, please), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the November Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

FICTION

# The Owl in the Oak



by Joseph  
Hansen

---

---

---

**A**lice Donovan was a small woman, past forty but brisk, with an open way about her, a smile and a perky word for just about everybody. She called her shop *Ye Olde Oak Tree* for the very good reason that an old oak sheltered it. Like a good many shops in Madrone, a tiny foothill town on California's central coast, hers had been converted from a spindly frame dwelling with jigsaw-work porches and bay windows. Most of these places sported fresh paint nowadays. *Ye Olde Oak Tree* was green with yellow trim.

The last time Hack Bohannon had noticed, Alice sold cheap china and pewter knickknacks, T-shirts and souvenir scarves, picture postcards, sunglasses, snapshot film, chewing gum, cigarettes—and cookies, when she felt like baking. She kept antiques that needed work. Bohannon recollected a treadle sewing machine in the front yard, an old wooden Maytag with hand-cranked wringers. A wagon wheel had leaned against the trunk of the oak. Bad oil paintings slumped on the porch, seascapes mostly—the ocean was over yonder, on the far side of the highway.

All this was gone now. Neat beds of pansies and petunias lay to either side of the foot-

path. Bohannon's boot heels knocked across an empty porch. And when he opened the door and stepped inside, he didn't recognize the place. New paint, wallpaper, carpet on the floor. The antique rockers, highboys, commodes were sleekly refinished. Not a postcard rack remained, no T-shirts, visor hats, suntan lotion. Good Mexican *terra cotta* pots stood on shelves. Fine baskets occupied corners. Soft serapes in natural wool colors hung against the walls. On velvet in glass cases lay bracelets, necklaces, rings in hand-wrought silver set with turquoise and jade.

The shop took up the two front rooms of the little house, parlor, sitting room. He stepped behind a counter and opened an inner door. Built-in diamond-paned sideboards said this had been a dining room. Magazines, books, cassettes, a camera and boxes of film crowded them now. The room had only space enough for two wing chairs, a coffee table, a television set—and these were all it held. He pushed a swinging door and was in the kitchen. A deputy had used a black magic marker on the pale vinyl tile of the floor to outline where and how Alice Donovan's small body had lain when her hulking son Howard had found it last night. Next to a glass of white wine on a

counter, slices of apple and a wedge of yellow cheese lay on a saucer, a paring knife in the sink.

The back door stood open, and he frowned at that. Gerard ought to have posted an officer here. Bohannon squinted at the door and the frame. A deadbolt had been broken. Someone had wanted badly to get in. Early this morning, as soon as news of the murder got on the radio. A size twelve shoe had forced the door, a shoe muddy from the dew in the brush out back. He scowled around him. Had big-foot found what Bohannon was here to look for? That would be a hell of a note.

Morning sunlight came cheerfully through a window over the sink and slanted onto the place where Alice Donovan had died. The patch of dried blood there was the size of a dinner plate. Someone had smashed her skull in, unhooked a cast-iron skillet from its place in a row of pans over the stove and hit her from behind. Lieutenant Gerard of the Madrone sheriff's office figured big, shambling Howard had done it. Howard was sitting in a cell. He claimed he had been on the beach, alone all evening, thinking. He had killed eight cans of beer. The empties were there, bobbing in the surf among the rocks to prove it, if anyone cared to check.

"And many more besides," Gerard grunted, "I have no doubt. Christ, people love to make the world ugly, don't they?" He wadded the last bite of a cruller into his mouth and washed it down with coffee from a chipped mug. "No, Howard and Alice had been on a collision course since he was born. She babied him through years one to thirteen, then made him the man in her life, right? Except he could never do what he wanted, only what she wanted."

"You could say—" Bohannon tilted back in a straight oak chair "—he went direct from the nursing bottle to the whisky bottle."

Howard had spent times away from Madrone in hospitals that promise to cure addictive personalities and sometimes succeed—though not with Howard. He wasn't much more than twenty, but no peace officer who'd ever had to deal with him, Bohannon not excepted, figured him for less than a dangerous drunk for life—or at least for as long as he lasted. He was quite a driver when he drank. He had totaled two cars of his mother's, and others that had belonged to former friends.

"His buddies don't want him around," Bohannon said.

"Except Beau Larkin," Gerard said. "Worse than Howard. Beau'd be in Folsom if his dad wasn't a San Luis cop."

"Howard never got violent with Alice. Not once."

"There's always a first time." Gerard crumpled the white paper sack the cruller had come in and dropped it into a wastebasket. "Nothing was stolen, Hack. Whoever did it didn't have to force entry. No, Howard came home drunk, and they had another argument—their last one."

"Fred May doesn't think so," Bohannon said.

"Right. And that's why you're here." Gerard pawed the files, photographs, reports on his desk and found cigarettes. He lit one and looked at Bohannon through the smoke. "Fred wants you to find evidence that somebody else killed Alice Donovan." He gave a thin smile. "You do as much police work as you used to when you were on the payroll here, Hack. Why don't you just come back, and stop being so stubborn?"

Bohannon had been a deputy for fourteen years; then it had gone sour for him, he'd quit, and opened boarding stables up Rodd canyon. He liked the company of horses better than that of men, but people in trouble kept coming to him for help, so he'd taken out a private investigator's license. He didn't know how to turn folks away. But he would never come back to work here. He hated the very sounds and smells of the place, the

desks, files, jangling phones, even the lighting. He and Gerard had been partners, friends. They weren't enemies now, but they'd never be the same again.

"Give me the keys," Bohannon said. "I'll go see if Fred's got a case or not."

When Bohannon passed it, May came waddling out of his office and walked beside him down the hallway. May, on the staff of the county attorney, was a public defender when the need arose. He was no paper-shuffler but a bright lawyer with a belief in justice nothing could shake—certainly not offers of money. He would have been better paid almost anywhere else. Luckily, his wife and kids were decent as he was. If a battered VW bug was wheels enough for him, if he could get through the days in sweat-shirts, cheap jeans, and worn-out tennis shoes, so could they, and cheerfully. Bohannon pushed open the side door of the substation, and the fat man followed him out to the parking lot where patrol cars stood collecting leaves and pods from the towering eucalypts that hedged the tarmac. May said:

"You know what bothers me? Not that nothing was stolen. What bothers me is that Alice Donovan had anything worth stealing. Where did she get the money to upgrade the place so suddenly?"

"Why not from the bank?" Bohannon had lately wrecked his faithful old GM pickup, and the one parked out here now was new, shiny, apple green. He pulled open the door and climbed up into it. It didn't smell of alfalfa and dried manure yet. It still smelled new. He kept thinking it didn't belong to him. "She owned the property, didn't she? Why didn't she take out a loan on it?"

"I don't know—" May's moon face winced up at him "—but she didn't. Not in this area. We checked it out. See what you can find, Hack. There's an answer someplace."

"She didn't tell Howard?" Bohannon slammed the door of the pickup and slid the key into the ignition. "Or is he too hung over to talk?"

"He's not hung over, but she said it was a secret. She teased him, like he was five years old: 'I've got a secret, I won't tell—'"

"Don't sing, Fred," Bohannon said.

"Sorry about that. But he did say something interesting. Said he saw her hide something. If it was money, Howard wanted it. For booze, right? When he thought it was safe, he dug it out, but she caught him before he could open it."

"So he doesn't know if it was money or what." Bohannon started the truck. Over the

smooth hum of the engine May said:

"A cardboard box with rubber bands around it. He looked for it again, every chance he got, but he never found it."

"Maybe I'll have better luck." Bohannon released the parking brake. "I won't have to worry about Alice walking in on me, will I?" He lifted a hand, and drove off.

Now, in the silent kitchen, he got down on hands and knees to probe low cupboards that smelled of soap powder. He climbed a flimsy aluminum step stool to grope on high shelves among cobwebby cut glass, cracked plates, forgotten gift boxes of fancy teas. In a shadowy hallway he unloaded sheets, pillowcases, towels from a linen closet. Nothing. He got the step stool and poked his head through a ceiling trapdoor. Nothing but rafters, dust, and heat.

Alice Donovan's bedroom was neat and smelled faintly of sandalwood perfume. He found nothing that didn't belong there. She wouldn't hide whatever it was in Howard's room, but he searched that anyway. Empty pint vodka bottles rattled among the cleated shoes on the closet floor. The closet smelled of the sweaty jeans, shirts, jackets that hung there. On the shelf lay shoulder pads, helmets, a catcher's mitt, and a stack of



dog-eared magazines with photos of naked young women. The bed was unmade. In the dust-balls under it lay empty beer cans and crumpled potato chip bags.

The bedside stand held a lamp and a digital clock whose red numerals read 3:00. Plainly Howard hadn't bothered setting it again after the last power outage. Maybe time, along with everything else but his thirst, had ceased to have meaning for Howard. Bohannon opened a drawer in the table. Candy bar wrappers, scratched California lottery tickets, rubber bands, a broken pencil. And photographs. Half a dozen. Of a red-haired young woman who looked tall. Taken someplace among boats—Morro Bay? She wore tight jeans, a striped tank top, sunglasses that didn't hide her exceptional good looks. He tucked the photos into a shirt pocket and went to check out the bathroom.

It was shiny clean, and Alice Donovan had not hidden anything there. Back in the kitchen, he opened the refrigerator. He'd never seen so many cans of beer outside a market. He took one, figuring Howard wouldn't mind, since Bohannon was trying to save his sizeable hide. A noise came from the shop. He must have left the door unlocked. He set down the beer can and jogged

for the front rooms. A large, expensively dressed woman was peering into one of the glass cases. She turned and stared at him in surprise. He understood. In his Levi's, cowboy boots, sweaty stained Stetson, he plainly was no dealer in jewelry and antiques.

"Who—who are you?" A thick envelope was in her hand. She poked it hastily into a large handbag. "What are you doing here?"

"Investigator for the county attorney," he said. "Bohannon is my name. What's yours?"

"Where's Mrs. Donovan?" She came toward him, peering past his shoulder through the open door into the living quarters. She called out, "Alice? It's Margaret Weems." She looked at Bohannon. "We had an appointment." She read a tiny jewelled watch on a wrist strong enough to control an eight horse hitch. "For twelve noon." She blinked. "Investigator?"

"Mrs. Donovan met with an accident," Bohannon said.

Margaret Weems went very still. Fashion wasn't doing her kind any favors. The exaggerated shoulders of the moment made her look like a linebacker in drag. Her tongue touched her lips. He couldn't read the look in her eyes. "Is she—all right? An automobile accident, you mean?"



Bohannon shook his head. "Assault. She's dead."

"My God." The woman's knees gave. Bohannon stepped out from behind the counter to catch her arm, but she didn't want that. She sat down, breathing hard, clutching the purse tight against her. She managed a pale, apologetic smile. "Excuse me. I'll just sit here a moment, if I may. It's such a shock."

"Get you anything?" he asked. "Water? Brandy?"

Eyes closed, she shook her head. "Assault. How dreadful." She opened her eyes. "She was so tiny."

"Were you a friend?" Bohannon said.

"Friend?" Her brief laugh had no humor in it. "No. Just a—customer." Her gaze caressed the jewelry, pottery, weaving. "She had such lovely things, didn't she?"

"You used her first name," Bohannon said. "If you were a friend, I thought maybe you could help me here."

Her look was guarded. "Help you how? With what?"

He shrugged. "If you talked together, maybe she said something—was she frightened of anything, anyone?"

Margaret Weems snorted. "Have you met her son?"

Bohannon grinned. "He once lifted me up over his head and threw me into the ocean. He

and his high school friends got a little rowdy that night. Howard's a big, strong boy."

"I don't know how she could bear having him here."

"He's been locked up for the murder," Bohannon said. "I'm supposed to find evidence he didn't do it."

Margaret Weems gave a wry laugh. "I wish you luck," she said, and got off the chair, and walked out. Bohannon wanted to ask her what was in that envelope she'd stuffed so hurriedly into her handbag. But it would be smarter to wait. He watched her settle into a Mercedes that looked as if it got washed and waxed every day. He watched it roll off down the dusty trail, then went back to the kitchen to finish off his beer and nail shut the back door.

He found the box twenty minutes later, in a spring-operated compartment hidden behind a beautifully mitered drawer in a General Grant low-boy with a marble top. He sat on the fresh crimson velvet of a carved walnut chair, twanged the rubber bands from around the box, and lifted the lid. A sour smell came out. Inside lay a stack of small envelopes, note size, fastened by another rubber band. When he lifted them out, he saw a little packet of

olive drab velvet, the same fabric that lined Alice Donovan's glass display cases.

He unfolded the velvet from around a piece of Navajo jewelry, a buckle. Not new like the stuff the Donovan woman was selling. Old. The stone was brown, not blue or green, and the heft of the piece, its time-worn smoothness, told him it was special. He rewrapped it and tucked it into his shirt pocket with the snapshots of the redhaired girl. Then he snapped the rubber band off the envelopes and shuffled through them. They were stained and gritty to the touch.

All were addressed in ballpoint pen to an Estella Hernandez at a post office box in Guadalupe. There was no return address. He pulled a letter out of its envelope. It was signed only G. He read it and blinked. G seemed pretty worked up. He folded that letter and put it back in its envelope and read the others, one by one. G evidently thought he was in love. Starlight and birdsongs and the moon shining on a midnight ocean got into the letters, but so did steamy sexual stuff. One of the letters, the first one, was signed Galen. The postmarks were all Madrone. He rubber-banded the envelopes, stuffed them into a pocket of his Levi jacket, put the empty box back

into the lowboy, closed the drawer, and left Alice Donovan's silent shop, locking the door behind him.

Halfway down the path, he paused to squint up at the oak. Crows were making a racket there, flapping around, diving at something hidden in the leafage. It was an owl, a big Western horned owl. He hunched on a branch, and looked like he meant to stay there, like it was his tree, and the crows could do their damndest but he wasn't leaving. He glared up at them with round yellow eyes and clacked his beak at them from time to time, and now and then spread his wings and bounced up and down as if on springs. Then he'd crouch again, screwing his head around to face them, this way, that way, no matter from what angle they came at him. Bohannon wished him luck and climbed into his new pickup.

Deputy T. Hodges was seated at a little square table on the screened porch of a luncheonette in Madrone. The table top was Formica in a red gingham pattern. A red paper napkin lay crumpled beside T. Hodges' plate. The remains of a hamburger and a scattering of french fries lay on the plate. She was nursing what Bohannon guessed

was cold coffee. When he banged in at the screen door, her shiny dark eyes lit up for a second in a smile. She didn't often smile with her mouth. She had the notion that her front teeth stuck out, which they did a little, and this embarrassed her. By the time he pulled the empty chair out at her table, she was frowning. She read her watch.

"I've only got ten minutes left," she said.

"Sorry." He sat down. "I was looking for something and I wasn't too quick about finding it. You haven't had dessert. Shall we eat peach pie together?"

A fat girl in a sweatshirt stenciled RAIDERS came to the table and took a pencil from behind her ear. "Mr. Bohannon. Hi. How's my pal, Geranium?"

Geranium was a broad-backed, placid old buckskin mare who never put a big hoof wrong, and Cassie felt safe on her when she came up to the stables with one of her assorted boyfriends to ride the canyon trails on Mondays, when the cafe was closed.

"She missed you the other day," Bohannon said.

"I went swimming." She made a face. "Tony said we were going sailing in his boat, but he kept tipping it over. What will you have?"

"Peach pie for both of us,"

Bohannon said. "And Deputy Hodges needs a refill, and I'll have coffee, too, please."

"You got it," Cassie said, took T. Hodges' plate, and padded away.

"Looking for what?" T. Hodges said.

He told her. Then he laid the snapshots in front of her. "Ever see that girl before?"

"Howard had these?" Marveling, she shuffled them. "Yes, it's Andrea Norse." She gave an exaggerated sigh of envy and laid the photos down. "Stunning."

"College girl?" he said.

"She's past thirty, Hack, believe it or not. No, she's a psychological counselor for the county, family relations, that kind of thing. I suppose—" she touched the photos, lining them up—"that was how Howard met her, right?"

"Sounds logical." Bohannon scooped up the pictures and put them away. "Only what was she doing on a date with him? Letting him take her picture?"

"Maybe he didn't," she said. "Why not ask her?"

"I will." Bohannon laid the little packet of velvet on the table and unfolded it. "What does this suggest to you?" T. Hodges' eyes opened wide. She picked up the Navajo piece and studied it. "Stolen," she said.

"You're sure?"

She nodded. "From a private collection of old Indian jewelry in San Luis. The Kanter collection. By housebreakers six months ago. Every piece had been photographed, of course, for insurance company records. The San Luis police sent out fliers illustrated with the photos. I can dig ours out for you if you want."

"Valuable then," Bohannon said. Cassie came with the coffee pot and two slices of pie. She filled their mugs and admired the Navajo piece. "That's pretty." She looked enviously at T. Hodges. "He giving you that? What is it—your birthday or something?"

"It's stolen," T. Hodges said. "He's under arrest."

"I'll phone the TV news," Cassie said, and went away.

"In the neighborhood of a hundred thousand dollars." T. Hodges wrapped the piece up again. "For the whole collection, I mean." She held the little packet out, and Bohannon put it back into his shirt pocket. She cut into her pie. "What was Alice Donovan doing with something so valuable?"

"Why wasn't she the thief?" Bohannon said.

"Because the thief is in jail and the collection is back with the Kanters, all but this piece, which the thief insists he didn't sell. He didn't have time."

Bohannon ate pie, drank coffee, and thought. "Some kind of insurance scam on the part of the owners?"

"I think Mr. Kanter owns most of San Luis."

"Do you know exactly when Alice upgraded that shop?"

"About a year ago," T. Hodges said. "Mmm. This pie is heavenly."

"About a year ago a local man named Galen had an affair with a Guadalupe woman called Estella Hernandez."

"Ah—those letters you mentioned?"

"You know any man named Galen in Madrone?" Bohannon lit a cigarette and drank coffee. "It's not a common name."

"No Galens," she said. "You'll have to ask Estella Hernandez, won't you?"

"If I can find her. From the letters, I take it she lived in a trailer, mobile home. She could be long gone by now." He gave his head a shake. "What do you think? Was Alice Donovan into extortion? Freddy May says she didn't borrow the money to fix up the business. She couldn't have saved anything from the operation the way it was, nickels and dimes. And Howard must have cost a lot, smashing cars and having to be dried out in hospitals."

"So she blackmailed this Galen?" T. Hodges polished off

her pie. "And Galen finally got fed up and stepped into the kitchen last night and bashed her head in with a skillet? Then why didn't he take the letters away with him?"

"I told you—they were hidden. No time to look for them. Howard got home very soon after she was killed. The killer would have had to hightail it not to be caught." Bohannon finished his coffee, took a long last drag from the cigarette, put it out. "Maybe it was Galen who came back early this morning and kicked in the back door, hoping to find the letters."

"And never found them," T. Hodges said.

"We better go." Bohannon got to his feet, slid bills from a worn wallet, laid them on the table for Cassie. He held open the screen door for T. Hodges. At the foot of the steps, on the crooked little trail, she read her watch again and looked woebe-gone.

"I'm really late," she said.

"I'll drive you back," he said.

**H**e wanted to report to Fred May, but May was in court. So Bohannon drove down through the dunes, headed for Guadalupe. He didn't get there. He found a trailer park in a swale on the land side of the beach highway. The office had a temporary look

to it, plywood and studs, but it had been there a while—the wood had darkened from rain, sun, wind, and salt spray. It had warped, too. When someone called, "Come in," from behind the door, he had to shoulder the door to get it open. It scraped the floor. The plywood counter had little bonsai trees on it, and a tiny Japanese woman in a wash-faded housedress was snipping at the branches of the trees, craftily, keeping them stunted, and perfect. Her face was like a withered apple. She smiled at him with crooked brown teeth and gave a little bow.

Bohannon touched his hat brim. "One of your tenants an Estella Hernandez?"

Her answer made him think of an owner's manual he'd got with a stereo he and Linda had bought some years back. It was in English, all right, but neither of them had been able to understand it. But the little lady was used to this, it looked like. She laughed at herself, came from behind the counter, took his elbow, led him back outside, and pointed out the Hernandez trailer to him.

It was like the rest of them there, half-hearted efforts at looking like tract houses. Like the rest, it had been some time since it had rolled down any highway on wheels. A tin awn-

ing held up by spindly pipes sheltered the side of the place. A skinny brown boy of maybe ten sat on the doorstep with a scuba diver's mask in his hand. When he heard the crunch of gravel under Bohannon's boots, he looked at him, got off the steps, and walked away, glum resignation in the slump of his shoulders, the way he scuffed the ground. Bohannon pulled open a flimsy screen and knocked on the door.

From inside, a woman's voice called to him in Spanish.

"It's Galen," he said. "Open up, Estella."

She opened the door, a dark, slim young woman, heavy breasts in a flower print halter, a very tight pair of jeans, bare feet with crimson toenails. She blinked long furry black lashes at him, and gave a short, mocking laugh. "One thing I do know is voices," she said. "Galen has a high voice." She tilted her head and smiled while her glance ran up and down him. "If you sang, you would sing bass." She frowned, puzzled. "Did Galen send you?" She glanced up at the sun. "It is early in the day."

"Galen didn't send me," he said, and took out his wallet. "And I'm not a client." He showed her his license. "I'm with the county attorney. I need to find Galen."

"What for?" She waved a mocking hand at the wallet. "You don't mean to tell me Galen has committed a crime." She laughed. "He would not have the courage."

"What's his last name, Estella? Where does he live?"

"How do you know about him and me?"

Bohannon showed her the letters.

"I threw those in the garbage," she said.

"That's what they smell like," Bohannon said.

She made a bitter face. "That is what they are."

"You know Galen wouldn't have sent me or any other man here. He was in love with you."

"He is a crazy fool. He nearly got both of us killed with his stupid jealousy."

"He didn't like your line of work?" Bohannon said.

She snorted. "A romantic teenager of fifty years of age. A married man. With a grandchild."

"His last name, please, Estella?"

She narrowed her eyes. "What is it worth to the county attorney's office?"

"Worth not getting busted for prostitution," Bohannon told her, "and for keeping a child on unfit premises."

She sighed grimly. "Why did I think you would be different?"

It don't matter how goodlooking, a cop is a cop. His name is Worthy. Isn't that a joke?"

"And what's his line of work?" Bohannon said.

"He is a dentist." Her laugh was dry. "Galen, the first Galen in history, you know, was a famous Roman physician. He told me this. So his parents wanted him to be a doctor, but he failed medical school. You've got to have brains to be a doctor."

G. B. Worthy's offices were on the second floor of a brick business building in Madrone that didn't show its brick to the street any more. The front had been dressed in pecky cedar boards. The notion was to make the town look like the Wild West of 1880. Bohannon didn't much like that. The waiting room had bland framed prints on the walls, a pair of couches, a coffee table, a rack of magazines, a green tank of lazily swimming tropical fish. With a knuckle he touched the opaque glass of a service window. The woman who slid the glass back he pegged as Mrs. Worthy. She was stout, middle-aged, and fixed her hair around her head in bulky braids, yellow hair tinged with gray. She smiled with stunning teeth. "Have you an appointment?"

"I need some help from the doctor," Bohannon said, and

showed her his license. "It's a law enforcement matter. It shouldn't take long."

She nodded knowingly, as if law enforcement matters were daily occurrences around there, as if the doctor were consulted by peace officers routinely, said, "One moment, please," closed the sliding glass. Voices murmured, then an inner door opened and a goodlooking man, trim, slim, mustached, smiled and held out a hand. He said, "Whose dental charts do you want to see, Mr. Bohannon?"

Bohannon took the hand, gave Galen Worthy a conspiratorial look, and drew him out into the waiting room. He said softly, "Tell her we're going for coffee."

Worthy frowned and pulled his hand away. "What for? I don't understand. A police matter, my wife said."

Bohannon murmured, "The death of Alice Donovan. You want to discuss that here?"

"I—I don't know what you're talking about." Worthy's Adam's apple pumped. He turned a bad color. "Alice who?"

Bohannon pulled the smelly letters from his pocket and held them out so the dentist could get a good look. "Donovan. These were in her possession. You wrote them. Or so Estella Hernandez says."

The glass panel slid open. Mrs. Worthy said, "Galen, is



everything all right?" She eyed Bohannon dubiously.

Her husband gave her a nervous smile. "It's all right, dear. But I have to go out for a few minutes."

"I won't keep him long," Bohannon told her.

He drove the dentist in his new pickup truck out of town, which didn't mean far in a little place like Madrone. They parked on a dusty foothill road. Worthy had been silent. Now he burst out:

"There are supposed to be two kinds of luck. Why do I always have the bad kind?"

"They say we make our own." Bohannon lit a cigarette.

"You'll kill yourself with those," Worthy snapped at him. "Worse than that, you'll kill those around you."

"I won't, but those letters could," Bohannon said. "How did the Donovan woman get hold of them, anyway?"

Worthy made a sour noise meant for a laugh. "Found them. You know how people dump their trash up in the canyons? Just drive along to a lonely spot and heave it out off the edge of the road. Disgusting."

"Go on," Bohannon said.

Worthy rolled down the window and waved a hand in front of his face to fend off the smoke. "Well, Alice had sent Howard on some errand, and he was

hours late getting back. It was going to be dark soon. Knowing him, she figured he'd gotten drunk and passed out somewhere. So she borrowed a neighbor's car and went to find him. He'd driven off the road down a steep embankment. The car had come to rest in a huge pile of plastic trash bags."

"From Estella's trailer camp, right?" Bohannon said.

Worthy's mouth twitched. "And bags had split open and spilled, hadn't they? And here were my letters strewn around for all the world to read. And the rest you know, don't you? How my money smartened up that shop for her?"

"To save your marriage?" Bohannon patted the letters in his side pocket. "I thought you loved Estella."

"Doris—Mrs. Worthy—put me through dental school after my own family gave up on me. I owe her everything."

"And it doesn't matter if you're a good dentist or not," Bohannon said, "she keeps you in style, right?"

"I didn't kill Alice Donovan," Worthy said.

"What size shoe do you wear, doctor?" Bohannon said.

Worthy blinked. "What kind of question is that?"

"Somebody heard on the early morning news that Alice was dead and hustled over to her

shop and kicked in the back door with a size twelve shoe. Why wasn't it you, trying to get hold of these letters ahead of the sheriff?"

"It wasn't me." Worthy shook his head hard. "I drove straight to the office. You found the letters, not me."

"I didn't say you found them, only looked for them."

"I wasn't anywhere near there. I didn't know she was dead until you told me. We don't put the TV on in the mornings. Ask Doris."

Bohannon looked at him with his eyebrows raised.

"No. I don't mean that. She mustn't know."

"You and she go to work in the same car?" Bohannon said.

"She goes first to get things ready. I follow later."

"So you can't prove you didn't detour past Alice's."

Worthy said stubbornly, "And you can't prove I did." He read his watch. "I have to get back. I have appointments."

"What about last night?" Bohannon crushed out his cigarette in the dashboard ashtray and pushed the little metal drawer shut. "Around midnight. You weren't at Alice's then, either?"

"I was in bed, asleep."

Bohannon twisted the key in the ignition and the new engine hummed to life. He couldn't get

used to its quiet after the clatter of his old truck. It took him by surprise every time. Sometimes he didn't know the damned thing had started at all. He glanced at the dentist.

"You know, if you were there, either last night or this morning, chances are somebody saw you. Alice's place isn't the only one on that road. There are neighbors. It's not a dead end. It's on the way. People drive it. So if you'd like to change your story before it begins to fall apart, now is the time to do it."

Worthy stared straight ahead through the clean windshield. "It isn't a story," he said, "it's the truth."

"Then you've got nothing to be tense about." Bohannon reached over and touched the tight fist on the dentist's knee. Worthy jerked the hand away as if from an electric shock. "Relax," Bohannon said. "If anybody tells your wife, it won't be me."

"Give me back those letters," Worthy pleaded.

"Later," Bohannon said.

**“W**hat you have to know,” he told Fred May, “is that somebody

big got there before me this morning and broke the lock on the back door.”

“And it wasn't Howard,” the

fat man smiled. "Good work, Hack. Who was it?" He touched the stained envelopes on his desk. "The dentist?"

"His feet are too small." Bohannon stared out the window, smoking, a can of beer in his hand. "And he claims he wasn't there. If he was, he didn't find the letters."

"It couldn't have been the Weems woman?" Fred May rocked back in his oak swivel chair and the spring twanged. "You say she's big."

"She still doesn't wear size twelve shoes." Bohannon took a swallow of beer, watched smoke from his cigarette drift out the window into the warm, late afternoon air. "And I don't think she knew Alice Donovan was dead."

"You really think she came to make a payment to her?" He poked with a fat finger at the Navajo buckle that lay on its ragged little square of velvet among the typed, blue-papered briefs and law books on the desk. "To keep Alice from revealing she was in possession of stolen property?"

Bohannon frowned and shook his head. "It doesn't make sense, Fred." He flicked the spent cigarette out the window into a flowerbed and dropped onto an oak chair. "Why pay a black-mailer when you could easily explain to the San Luis police

that you'd bought it innocently? It would be cheaper to take the loss on what she'd paid for it than to keep shelling out to Alice for the rest of her life."

"Then there's something Alice had around the place you didn't find." May drank diet soda from a can. "Or did the early riser who kicked in the door find it?"

"There wasn't any sign anybody had done any searching for anything." Bohannon finished his beer and tossed the empty can into the brown metal wastebasket beside May's desk, and made a face. "If bigfoot even came inside, he found what he wanted right there in the kitchen, or what he thought was there wasn't."

"What would it be?" May's forehead wrinkled.

"When I find him, I'll ask him." With a sigh, Bohannon got to his feet. It had been a long day. He was tired. "Meantime, I need the key to Alice's cash register."

May said, "Right here," opened a drawer, and took out a little flat key. Bohannon held his hand out, and May put the key into it. "What do you expect to find?"

Bohannon grinned and tossed the key in his hand. "Photographs of a very large, middle-aged lady," he said, "doing something she shouldn't."

The house was an expensive one on the beach, stone and beams and gloomy smoked glass on the road side. From the road where he left the pickup, he looked down on the flat roof of the house that was covered in rocks white as chalk. He went down sandy stone steps into a cavelike entryway and put his thumb on a bell push. He stood listening to the silky rush and retreat of waves on the beach, and then the door opened. It wasn't the Weems woman. It was a young man, dressed in next to nothing. He was smooth and tan. His lean musculature looked carved. His hair was curly and black and he wore it long. Bohannon wondered on what beach Margaret Weems had found him.

Bohannon wasn't a type he'd encountered before. He looked puzzled, but he didn't say anything.

"Mrs. Weems here?" Bohannon gave his name. "We met this morning. Tell her. She'll remember me."

The young man blinked. Something was happening under all that theatrical hair. Maybe he was thinking. At last, with a small shrug, he turned and went down a long room whose far end had a wall of glass that showed the beach and the sea. The sun was low-

ering and the light on the water was turning flame-colored. The young man stepped outside, Bohannon stepped inside, shut the door behind him, went down the long room. The young man was back in the open panel of the glass wall in no time.

"What do you want?" he said in a French accent.

"I have something for Mrs. Weems from Alice Donovan's shop." He raised his voice, in case Margaret Weems was within earshot. "She'll want to see it."

The young man stepped toward him. "You must telephone and make the appointment." He reached for Bohannon's arm. Bohannon didn't want to knock him down, but he wasn't about to leave. He shook the hand off. The youth tried again, and a voice reached them both. Margaret Weems stood in the open glass panel. Her white terry cloth robe made her look like a polar bear.

"Oh, Mr. Bohannon." Her smile was nervous, and she lied. "I misunderstood. Jean-Marie's accent puzzles me sometimes." She tried for a laugh and missed. She came to them, gently but firmly pried the youth away from Bohannon, and aimed him at an inner doorway. "Dear Jean, be a darling and find us all some bubbly, will you?"

"Beer," Bohannon said, "thanks."

Jean-Marie scowled like a six-year-old, but after a second's pause, he grumbled away, glancing back menacingly at the pair of them. A jealous lover in the authentic Gallic mode, out of a silent movie. Funny.

Margaret Weems put a finger to her lips and led Bohannon out onto the deck, across the deck, down to the sand. She took his arm and hustled him along the sand. "You've got the pictures. That's what you found at Alice's shop, isn't it? Those dreadful pictures. Give them to me."

"You were paying Alice to keep quiet about them."

"I'll pay you. The money's in the house. Only give them to me. And the negatives? She said I could have the negatives this time."

"I don't think so," Bohannon said.

Her face fell. She let him go. "What?"

"I don't think she'd give you those." He gestured at the house. "You're well fixed, it appears to me. No, I think she'd bleed you with those pictures forever."

She sighed. "Of course. You're right. Awful woman."

"Where were you at midnight last night?" he said.

"We had a party," she said. "It was very lively. Young peo-

ple. Music. Jean-Marie is a singer, you know. And a song writer. Guitar. Piano. He has a wonderful future. Everyone says so."

"Good," Bohannon said. "How late did this party run?"

"Until almost sunrise," she said.

"And you stayed until the last guest left?"

She gave him a rueful laugh. "Those were the days, weren't they? No, I was in bed by one thirty, two. You can ask any of them—and you will, won't you?"

"When you give me the guest list," he said.

"Right away," she said.

Jean-Marie came along the sand, carrying a tray on which glasses glittered. All by his lonesome he turned this stretch of beach into the Côte d'Azur. There should have been a bevy of bikini-clad nymphets in his wake. Bohannon looked at Margaret Weems. She was watching the French lad as if she'd never seen anything so delicious in her life—and maybe she hadn't.

"Is it him Alice Donovan was threatening to show those photos to?" The photos had been taken in supermarkets and department stores. Alice must have followed her around for weeks with that camera hidden in a shopping bag. Margaret Weems was a shoplifter. Not

the first person—who-had-everything Bohannon had run into who couldn't keep from stealing. It was some kind of emotional short circuit. A bid for attention? Maybe once Jean-Marie came along, she'd given it up. "Would he leave you?"

She flushed. "Of course not. No, she'd have shown them to my husband. He'd divorce me. I'd lose everything."

"He doesn't object to Jean-Marie?"

"I'm only helping Jean-Marie with his career."

"Where is Mr. Weems these days?" Bohannon said.

"In Hong Kong. He owns electronics parts firms there. Also in Taiwan and South Korea. He's away much of the time."

"Too bad," Bohannon said.

Jean-Marie arrived with his tray. She beamed at him. "Dear boy," she said, and took a tulip champagne glass from the tray. While the French lad filled it, the Weems woman turned her smile on Bohannon. "I miss Henry, of course, but I manage to struggle along without him—somehow."

Bohannon took a glass and a bottle of Beck's from the tray. "I see that you do," he said, and poured his beer.

They sat down on the sand. Mrs. Weems rubbed a big terry cloth shoulder against the boy's

naked one. She said, "Mr. Bohannon works for the—uh—county attorney, and for reasons I can't hope to understand, he needs a list of our guests last night. Will you find it, please?"

The boy didn't turn to her. He watched leggy little shore birds getting in their last long-beaked probings of the glassy sand before nightfall. Maybe he was making up a song. He certainly wasn't worried. "Oui," he said.

Bohannon got in and out of his truck often in the next three hours. Each time he was behind the steering wheel again, he unfolded the list Jean-Marie had given him, and at the end the paper was coming apart. He sighed and tucked it away. He was on a twisty road with few street lamps in Settlers Cove, a section of houses hidden among pines on hills beside the sea. Because they were farthest off, he had first checked on the partygoers in Morro Bay and Los Osos. So far as any of them remembered—a skinny girl painter, a fortyish male dancer who wore mascara, a squat bald screenwriter in flowered knee-length surfer shorts—Margaret Weems had not only been highly visible in the house and on the beach at her place until the wee hours, but had been the life of the party. They all liked good old Margaret. Oysters chilled

on the half shell, duck pate, lobster, and all the champagne you could drink. Really, Margaret was something else. And the story had been the same among the sighing night pines of Settlers Cove. He'd heard it here from a reed player with spiky blue hair, from a music video producer with one leg in a cast, from Mitch Russell, the big, bushy-bearded man who ran the little theater in Madrone. No point bothering anyone else. Bohannon started the truck and headed for home, food, a shower, and bed.

When Bohannon stopped the truck at the far end of the long, white, green-trimmed stable building, pulled the parking brake, and killed the engine, George Stubbs came out of his sleeping quarters next to the tackroom. He was an ex-rodeo rider, a fat old man now, who hobbled, his bones and joints remembering long-ago breaks and sprains. Bohannon climbed wearily down out of the truck and slammed the door in the night silence. Horses stirred in their dark box stalls behind closed doors and nickered softly. Mountains loomed above the place, dark and shaggy. The air was cool.

Stubbs limped up, looking a little peeved. His thick fingers,

with their arthritis-swollen joints, were smudged with charcoal. Likely he'd been drawing in his room. He loved to draw—most commonly horses—and did it well and took pride in it. "Where you been all day and half the night? Couldn't you find a phone?"

"A crisis, was there?" Bohannon started for the house. "Anybody dead?"

Stubbs followed him. "Pretty dead supper in the oven, but I reckon that's my own fault, bothering about you."

"I'm sorry I didn't phone, George. I won't let it happen again." A long covered plank walk fronted the ranch house. Bohannon went along it to the kitchen, pulled the screen door, walked over to the big stove rearing up in a corner. He pulled open the door to the warming oven and squinted inside. Stubbs put a quilted mitten in his hand. Bohannon peeled foil off a beef, green pepper, noodle casserole, set it on a counter, shoveled it onto a plate. "This will be fine." He threw the skeptical-looking Stubbs a smile and carried the plate with a fork to the table. He sat down, began to eat—he was hungry—and a sheet of paper lying just outside the circle of light from the lamp in the center of the table caught his eye. "What's this?"



"T. Hodges was here tonight." Stubbs brought a mug of coffee to the table, sat down with a suppressed groan. "She stayed almost an hour, hoping you'd show up." He pried a bent cigarette from a crumpled pack, lit it with a kitchen match. "Finally says she had to go, and wrote you that."

The handwriting was just what he'd have expected of the deputy—firm and without flourishes, straight up and down, easy to read. It said a woman's dog had been struck and its leg broken on Pleasant Trail this morning early. Pleasant Trail was where Alice Donovan's shop was. And the woman lived across and just down the road from there. She said the car that hit the dog was a new red Suzuki Samurai but she didn't get the license number. It came out of the driveway at Ye Olde Oak Tree hell-for-leather, and caromed down the dusty little road. The driver was a tall, young-looking man with a deep tan and a trim little beard. The woman, Gladys Tyndall, didn't know him, never saw him before. But she would like to get her hands on him. Her dog was going to be okay, but he could as easily be dead for all that driver cared.

Bohannon scraped the fork around on the plate for the last taste of his supper. "That was

good," he said. "Hardly dried out at all. Thank you, George."

Stubbs grunted. "You want some coffee now?"

"Any of that blueberry cobbler of yours left?"

Stubbs brought the cold cobbler and a mug of hot coffee. Bohannon got up and trudged to the sideboard for a whisky bottle, came back with it, added a jolt of whisky to his coffee, and sat down. He picked up T. Hodges' note and rattled it at Stubbs. "You know any young man with a trimmed beard, a suntan, who drives one of those new little Japanese jeeps?"

"I thought you'd never ask," Stubbs said. He twisted out his smoked-down cigarette in the big glass ashtray that lived on the table. "Him and that red-haired tall girl been up here a couple times to ride the trails."

"Her name—" Bohannon had a mouthful of cobbler; he swallowed, gulped some coffee—"is Andrea Norse. What's his?"

"Beats me," Stubbs said. "It was her that signed in."

"So her address is in our records," Bohannon said.

"If it ain't," Stubbs said, "I'm slipping, and I better start thinking about the old folks' home."

Bohannon got to his feet and went into the shadows for the scuffed gray cardboard box of file cards.

The Samurai stood high on its wheels under drooping blue wisteria beside a rickety white frame cottage among a lot of others like it. This was one of the earliest spots built up in Settlers Cove. Bohannon got down from his truck, ducked under the wisteria that showered him with dew. He pulled open an aluminum screen door and rapped at a brightly varnished wooden door. It was just past seven in the morning. So quiet he could hear the surf breaking, many streets away. Nobody stirred inside the house. He lit a cigarette and knuckled the door again, harder this time. After a ten second pause, he heard the thump of footfalls, and the tall, redheaded girl opened the door, tugging down a big, loose sweater, shaking back her hair. She had on tight jeans and was barefoot. She winced in the morning light.

"What is it?"

"You know the owner of this vehicle?" Bohannon had his wallet out and open to show his license. He closed the wallet and pushed it away. "It struck a dog yesterday morning about this time, over on Pleasant Trail."

She looked wary. "Who are you, exactly?"

He told her. "Working for the public defender. On the Alice

Donovan case? Did you know her, Miss Norse?"

She paled. "I—yes, I counseled her son, Howard." Her smile was thin and didn't last. "He had problems."

"You didn't counsel his mother?" Bohannon said. "Wasn't she behind those problems?"

Her tone hardened. "She didn't see it that way."

"That's how I see it." Bohannon gave her his best smile. "Don't you agree with me?"

"It's very early in the morning, Mr. Bohannon. I have to get ready for work. If you'll excuse me—"

"The Samurai is not your car, is it?" he said.

A bearded young man, naked to the waist, buttoning brown walking shorts, came to the door. His dark hair was tousled from sleep. He blinked and yawned. He was tall enough to reach over Andrea Norse's head and take hold of the door she was holding open. "What's this all about?" he said.

Bohannon told him about the dog. "What's your name?"

"Wolfe. I'm sorry about the dog. I didn't know I'd hit anything. I'll pay the woman."

"You didn't know you hit anything because you came tearing out of Alice Donovan's driveway in a sweat. Why? What were you doing there? Why did

you kick in her back door? What was it you were after?"

Wolfe squinted. "Who's Alice Donovan?"

Looking mournful, Andrea Norse touched his chest. "It's no use, Zach. He knows we know her." She turned to face Bohannon. "We heard on the early morning radio news that Alice had been murdered. I was over there the night before, to plead with her to change her tactics with Howard. I'd tried before. Howard used to come to me in tears."

"Drunken tears?" Bohannon said.

"Not always, but always heartbroken. That sunny little woman. She was a monster, you know. Sex-starved, smothering, seductive—as mixed up and dangerous as they come."

"Should I quote you on that?" Bohannon twitched her a half smile. "It doesn't sound exactly clinical."

"No." She looked ashamed of herself. "But I couldn't stand by and not try to change the situation. She was destroying her own son. He was very disturbed when he came to this door night before last."

"So disturbed he killed her," Wolfe said, and swung away. "I need coffee."

"I don't think so," Bohannon said. And to the Norse woman, "So you went over to try to talk to her? When?"

"Howard stayed here spilling out his woes to me for hours. When I'd got him calmed down and he left, I drove over to Madrone. What time? Ten? A little past."

"And she was all right?" Bohannon said.

"Self-righteous, smug, superior. Did I think you learned about human nature from books? What was I—thirty years old? Had I raised children of my own? She tried to keep him straight. But he wasn't bright, and boys like that awful Beau Larkin kept getting him into trouble."

"You knew Howard. Could he have killed her?"

"She was his god. We don't kill our gods."

"She wasn't your god. You didn't use that skillet?"

"No, of course not. I'd taken Howard's case folder with me—his history. I wanted to go through it point by point, episode by episode; to show her just how she—"

"And she wouldn't listen, and you walked out," Bohannon said, "and in your anger you left the file behind, and the next morning you remembered, and sent Zach to get it before the sheriff could connect you to the killing."

"He got it," she said wryly, "but it seems it didn't help. What am I, now? Under arrest for murder?"

Bohannon shook his head. "I don't arrest people. I just ask questions. Can you prove you weren't there at midnight? What time did you get home? Was anyone here?"

"Zach and a friend, Sonny Snyder. When? Eleven? Zach put *Diva* on the VCR. He knows it always calms me down."

Bohannon turned away. "Tell him to stop in at the sheriff's about the dog before he goes to work." He ducked under the wisteria. In the road he dropped his cigarette and stepped on it. And a bullet slammed into his shoulder. He heard the report of the rifle as he fell. It echoed off the hills. A second shot kicked grit into his face but that was all. Then Zach Wolfe was kneeling beside him.

"It's all right," he said, "I'm a doctor."

Gerard said, "We'll handle it from now on. Okay?" He sat on a chrome and wicker chair in a hospital room. Clear noon sunlight fell on him from a window. It gleamed off his scalp. Gerard was developing a bald spot. Bohannon hadn't noticed that before. He sat up in the high bed, left arm in a sling, lunch on a tray in front of him. He laid the fork down. The food was tepid and tasteless.

"Did you let Howard go? Obviously, he didn't shoot me."

Gerard shrugged. "Alice was blackmailing people. You were tracking those people down. It made somebody nervous. It doesn't change Howard's status."

"More than nervous," Bohannon said. "Deadly."

"We found the shell casings up the hillside in a tangle of brush and ferns and trees. They could have come from a thousand rifles around here. Thirty-thirty. No dwellings up there. We can't find anybody who saw him."

Bohannon stuck with his thought. "If he was willing to kill me, he was willing to kill Alice Donovan."

"It wasn't Dr. Worthy." Gerard pushed back the crisp cuff of his tan uniform shirt to read his watch. "It wasn't Mrs. Weems." He stood up. "That was sharp of you, having Andrea Norse check on them right then by phone."

"Oh, I'm a hee-ro, I am. Lying there bleeding in the dust and gasping out orders with my dying breath."

"Don't let it go to your head." Gerard opened the door. From the hallway came the squeak of nurses' shoe soles, the jingle of medication trays, the clash of lunch dishes being collected. "Fred May wants us to give you a medal."

"He was here earlier," Bohannon said. "He feels worse

than I do about it. He takes things hard."

"We'll find who did it," Gerard said.

"Unless I find him first," Bohannon said.

Gerard turned back. "You stay where you are, damn it. It's the only way we can protect you." He spoke to the young deputy, posted on a chair outside Bohannon's door. "Don't let him trick you, Vern. He's sneaky."

Vern poked his yellow-haired head around the doorframe and grinned at Bohannon. "I'll watch him, sir," he said.

Looking half amused, half grim, Gerard went away.

The phone by the bed was almost as good as freedom. He rang T. Hodges to confirm a suspicion about the Kanter case. He rang Andrea Norse to bring the new truck down to the hospital. And Manuel Rivera, at the stables, to bring him clothes without bloodstains and a packet of little firecrackers that had lain in a drawer of the kitchen sideboard for years.

Rivera appeared in his sou-tane. He was preparing for priesthood and had supported himself while he studied at the seminary up on the ridge by working part time for Bohannon. Bohannon was going to be sorry to lose him. He was a good

worker and an even better friend.

"Close the door," Bohannon told him. "Help me get dressed." It was tricky. There was the arm in the sling to work around, and he was slow from the painkillers they'd given him. But they managed it. "Okay," he said. "Now, you open the door, say goodbye to me, go on down the hall and around the corner, then light the firecrackers, drop them, and walk out as if you had nothing to do with it."

Rivera regarded him with doubtful brown eyes.

"It will work," Bohannon said. "Who's going to suspect a priest?"

"No one will be harmed?" Rivera asked.

"It will just make a racket."

"I don't feel good about it," Rivera said.

"Do it anyway," Bohannon said. "A postulant should learn what it's like to sin. Manuel, go on. It's important."

The slim lad sighed, shook his head, but he went.

Bohannon's only worry was that the firecrackers were so old they wouldn't go off. But they did. A few of them, and made sufficient noise to send Vern racing down the hall and out of sight. Bohannon went the other direction. He found the truck with the keys in it in the

parking lot. By the time he was rolling down the street, his shoulder had begun to throb. But he was under way. He laughed to himself.

**H**e could hear the music a block off when he halted the truck at a stop sign. The neighborhood was one of ranch style houses on comfortable lots with well-grown trees. How were they taking that clamor—the thud of drums, the snarl of electric guitars? And the crowd noises that went with it, shouts, raucous laughter, four-letter words? The street was parked up, too. How did the neighbors like that? He turned a corner, found an alley, parked there, and entered the uproar through a back gate. The rock music hit him like an eighteen wheeler.

The crowd he could see was all male, teenage, college age, town boys, ranch boys, jeans, surfer trunks, workshoes, jogging shoes, baseball caps, straw hats, and crazily shaved heads with no hats at all. They stamped their feet to the roaring music, howled and whooped, pushed and tripped each other. At a brick outdoor barbecue a fat boy scorched hamburger patties. Beside the grill a plastic tub held beer cans on ice. Empty cans kicked around underfoot. Everybody had a can in

his hand except three boys who lay passed out on the grass. The smell of mesquite smoke was strong in the windless air of the hot afternoon. But so was the smell of marijuana.

Nobody noticed Bohannon. He looked around for the kid hosting this shindig. He would stand out. He was almost as big as Howard Donovan. Then Bohannon saw him. He came out the back door of the house, surrounded by squealing girls, carrying hamburger buns, ketchup, mustard, barbecue sauce. Drunken cheers went up as they pushed through the crowd toward the red-faced fat boy in the smoke. Bohannon followed, and waited until the girls scattered. He poked the big boy's ribs. Beau Larkin swung around and stared at him. The color drained from his face. He licked his lips. He stammered.

"Hey, where did you come from?"

"Come on." Bohannon caught his arm and hauled him out the back gate into the alley.

"You can't touch me, my father's a police officer."

"And he was on the Kanter robbery case, that collection of Navajo Indian jewelry. And one piece disappeared from the collection. I know your father. He's an honest cop. He didn't take it. I think you took it. And tried to sell it to Alice Donovan,

only she recognized it for what it was, and she's been black-mailing you with it ever since. Making you pay her not to tell your father."

Larkin reeked of beer. He peered glassily down at Bohannon. He swayed. His speech was slurred. "Howard said she'd buy it off me. I didn't know where else to go."

"Why did you kill her, Beau?"

"Because I was behind on my payments. My old man got sore and cut off my cash flow. I couldn't pay her. But she didn't care. She was going to tell him. I had to kill her. I thought I was out of trouble. But then you got the thing from where she had it hid. Cassie at the cafe told Tony about this stolen Indian buckle you had, and he told me. And I heard how smart you are, and I knew you'd be after me soon. So I had to kill you, too. And now I have to do it again." He lunged. His big hands grabbed Bohannon's throat.

Bohannon struggled. His shoulder screamed pain. He put an open hand against the boy's face and pushed. He kicked. He kneed. Nothing helped. The boy's thumbs were cutting off his air. The light was going out. His ears rang. Then a shout sliced through the back yard noise. A gun went off. Larkin let him go, and Bohannon staggered a few steps, gasping,

choking, until his legs wouldn't hold him. He slumped against a fence, and blurrily saw Larkin lying face down in weeds and cinders, and Vern bending over, snapping handcuffs on the boy's thick wrists.

"Hack, were you crazy?" T. Hodges made the rocker in Bohannon's

pine plank bedroom creak angrily. "Going after a giant like that—with only one good arm, just out of surgery? How did you expect to even get there?"

He lay in his own bed. That was the good part. The bad part was how sore his throat was. He couldn't swallow food. It even hurt to talk. The sound that came out was hoarse, no more than a whisper. "It's over now. Calm down."

"You were lucky Vern got there when he did."

Vern gave his toothy kid grin. "Lieutenant Gerard warned me he was tricky." He stood gangly at the foot of the poster bed. "Soon as I saw those firecrackers, I knew it was Mr. Bohannon back of it. He didn't get much of a start on me. Broke a lot of speed laws, though. With that old patrol car I had, I almost lost him a couple of times."

"I was drugged," Bohannon whispered, "didn't know what I was doing." He heard voices



in the hallway and looked at the door. Fred May came in, wearing a pup-tent-size pink sweatshirt that had once been red. He did his best to smile, but worry for how Bohannon felt spoiled the attempt. As if Bohannon were hovering near death, he looked for advice to the two young deputies.

"Is it okay?" he said. "I brought somebody."

"Fred, I'm all right." Bohannon hoped he was more successful with his try at smiling than May had been. "Who is it?"

Who it was filled the doorway. Howard Donovan. He held there, shy as a five-year-old, trying to find the words to thank Bohannon for getting him out of jail. "They all thought I killed my mother." Tears brimmed his eyes, and he used big fists to knuckle the tears away. "You knew I didn't do that. You knew I wouldn't."

"I was betting on it."

Howard grinned unexpectedly. "Even if I did pick you up

that night and throw you in the water."

"It's not the same," Bohannon said.

"That was only funning, wasn't it?" Howard said. He looked grave again. "She made me very mad sometimes, but I wouldn't hurt her. I never did hurt her. Even when she hit me. Not once." He frowned to himself. "It wouldn't be right. She was too little." He paused, and abruptly the small boy that lived in his head changed the subject. Excited. Eyes shining. "There's a big old owl up in our tree. Did you know that? And the crows been pestering him."

"Yes," Bohannon said, "I knew that."

"Well, guess what? When I came home from jail, there's black feathers all over the yard. Crow feathers. Guess that old owl showed them who's boss, didn't he?"

"It's his tree," Bohannon said. "We both knew that."

"And it's my house," Howard said. "Isn't it?"

# UNSOLVED

by Julie Spence

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the April issue.

Margaret Marshall sat mesmerized before the midnight movie, *The Mysterious Murders at Moorhead Mansion*. However, as moments marched by, Margaret was unable to maintain marathon meticulousness, and meanwhile missed miscellaneous minutiae of the Mephistophelian melodrama.

As she mused next morning over her muffin and milk, Margaret managed with a modicum of mental energy to remember most of the matter of the macabre mystery.

Marsha, who recently married Martin Markham, master of Moorhead Mansion, was miserable, for a meddlesome maid had mentioned to Marsha the rumor that Master Markham had murdered the former mistresses of Moorhead Mansion. Many a time Martin had muttered morosely to Marsha that most of his money had been manipulated away by his first five wives, who were, in no particular order, Maria, Marianne, Marlena, Martha, and Mary. In fact, Martin was so malevolent toward his now-deceased mates that Marsha feared Martin a madman and suspected the maid might be right. Lying motionless in her massive master bedroom, Marsha mulled over the maid's malicious remarks and stared at the misty portrait of her immediate predecessor, the fifth Mistress Markham. It was a mystery to Marsha what motivated Martin to maintain portraits of his former wives when he held such malignity toward them. In addition to the portrait in their second story bedroom, portraits of Martin's four prior mates hung in the billiards room, the conservatory, the dining room, and the library. Minutes past midnight, Marsha had a mantic thought. Mustering her mettle, Marsha moved from the bed and maneuvered by moonlight to the mantel where the bedroom portrait hung. The moment Marsha peered behind the painting she knew Martin had murdered the maligned mistresses of Moorhead Mansion, for taped behind it—and each of the other four portraits, which she moved quickly

to examine—Marsha found millions. Needless to say, long before morning, Marsha left Martin and the macabre Moorhead Mansion and headed for Monaco. From the following information, can you determine in what order Martin married his first five wives, and in which room of the two story mansion he hung each wife's portrait? (*Note: Martin Markham may have been a misogynous, maniacal malefactor, but he has always been meticulously monogamous.*)

1. Mary's portrait was on the first floor of the east wing of the mansion.
2. The dining room and the billiards room are on the same floor as the library, which is *directly* below the conservatory; the dining room is east of the library.
3. Maria was married to Martin before Martha, but they were not married to Martin consecutively.
4. The portrait of Martin's first wife and at least one other hung in the west wing of the mansion.
5. Marianne's portrait was on a different floor from, and west of, Marlana's; Marlana was married to Martin before the woman whose portrait hung in the dining room.
6. Mary and the woman whose portrait hung in the dining room were not married to Martin consecutively.

---

See page 95 for the solution to the February puzzle.

*"The Mysterious Murders at Moorhead Mansion," reprinted from Dell Book of Logic Problems #2, © 1987 Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc.*

# Death of a Romance Writer

by Joan Hess

ng, with nothing but simmering frustration as the result.

those granite gray eyes boring into her, for God's sake! It

more than anyone should have to bear... it really was.

---

---

The young woman hesitated at the top of the great curving staircase, grumbling rather rudely to herself as she gazed at the scene below. "Hell's bells!" she muttered under her breath. "Doesn't she like anything besides waltzes? A little new wave rock, or at least jazz?"

In the grand ballroom ladies dressed in pastel gowns swept across the floor under the benevolent eyes of elegant gentlemen in black waistcoats and ruffled shirts. A stringed orchestra labored its way through the familiar melodies with grim concentration. Servants moved inconspicuously along the walls of the vast room, their expressions studiously blank. The same old thing, down to the canapes and sweet sherry.

Gathering up her skirt with pale, delicately tapered fingers, the woman forced herself to move down the stairs. Her heart-shaped mouth was curled slightly, and her deep jade eyes fluttered across the crowd without curiosity. He would make an appearance in a few minutes, she reminded herself glumly, but perhaps she could have a bit of fun in the meantime. The fun would certainly end when he appeared—whoever he was.

"Lady Althea!" gushed a shrill, nasal voice from the shadows behind her. "I was so hoping to see you this evening. The ball is absolutely delightful."

Lady Althea, the woman repeated to herself. A silly name, as usual, invoking images of moonlit gardens and scented breezes. Why not a simple "Kate" or "Jane"? Oh, no. It was always "Desiree" or "Bianca," as if her bland personality must be disguised by alluring nomenclature.

The dowager tottered out of the shadows on tiny feet. In her seventies (hundreds, Althea sniffed to herself), the woman's face was a mesh of tiny lines, and her faded blue eyes glittered with malevolence. Her thin white hair was decorated with a handful of dusty plumes, one of which threatened to sweep across her hawkish nose with every twitch of the woman's head.

"Who're you?" Althea demanded bluntly.

The dowager raised a painted eyebrow. "I am your mother-in-law's dearest friend, Lady Althea. You had tea only yesterday at my summer home. Your first introduction to society, I believe. I'm amazed that it has slipped your mind."

"Yeah, sorry." Althea moved away from the woman's rancid breath and fluttery hands. Surely these people could be induced to brush their teeth, she thought testily. They didn't, of course. As

far as she could tell, they had no bodily functions whatsoever. A few bouts of the vapors, a shoulder slashed by a duelling sword, a mysterious scar across the cheek. But nothing mundane to interrupt the flow of their lives.

Ignoring the woman's frown, Althea stood on her toes to peer around the room. He wasn't here yet. Good. Now, if she could only liven up the music and get these nameless people to loosen up a little bit, the evening might provide some amusement. A ball could be a ball, but it seldom was.

The dowager was not ready to allow Althea to escape. "Your dear mother-in-law has told me of your tragic history, and I must tell you how much I admire your courage," she hissed. Little drops of spittle landed on Althea's cheek, like a fine mist of acid rain.

"Sure, thanks," Althea said. "I'm a plucky sort, I understand. Personally, I'd rather watch television or read a confession magazine, but I never get the chance."

"Television? What might that be, my dear girl?"

Althea shook her head. "Never mind. Hey, which one of these ladies" (dames, broads) "is my mother-in-law? The one with the chicken beak or that fat slug in the corner?"

"Lady Althea! I must tell you that I am somewhat shocked by your manner," the dowager gasped. Her hand fluttered to her mouth. "I was led to believe you had been raised most properly in a convent; that you were of gentle birth and delicate nature."

"Is that so? I guess I'd better behave," Althea said dryly. She tucked a stray curl of her raven black hair into place, and checked the row of tiny seed pearl buttons on her elbow-length gloves. Now that, she told herself sternly, was the accepted and expected behavior. She glanced at the dowager.

"So which one is my mother-in-law?"

"Your mother-in-law is there," the dowager said, gesturing with a molting fan toward a grim-visaged woman sitting on a straight-backed chair. "But where is your dear husband, Lady Althea? I had such hopes of speaking to him."

"Beats me," Althea said. So she was already married, she thought with a sigh. These rapid shifts were disconcerting. Dear husband, huh! Gawd, he was probably a bodice ripper like the rest of them. And she had decided to wear her new gown—genuine silk and just the right color for her eyes. Perhaps there was enough time to change into something more expendable.

Frowning, Althea glanced across the coiffed heads of the guests to study her mother-in-law. A real loser, with a profile that ought

to be illegal. Translucent blue complexion, hooded eyes, mouth tighter than a miser's purse. But the woman did have a smidgen of charm—all found in the garish diamond brooch on her chest. From across the room, Althea could see the brilliance of the stone, and even the dull glow of the gold setting. Now *that* was charming.

Leaving the dowager puffing resentfully at the bottom of the staircase, Althea began to thread her way between the dancers. Despite her intention of finding the punchbowl, she found herself curtsying in front of her mother-in-law. Damn.

"Althea, dear child," the woman said frostily. She extended a limp white hand, as though she expected Althea to clasp it to her bosom—or kiss it, for God's sake!

Althea eyed it warily. At last she touched it timidly, then snatched her hand away and hid it behind her back. "Good evening," she said, swallowing a sour taste in the back of her throat. The diamond brooch. It would keep her in penthouses and champagne for the rest of her life, if only . . .

"Excrutia, this child is charming!" the dowager said, shoving Althea aside. "But where is your son? Dear Jared must be eager to present his charming bride to his friends . . ."

Jared, huh. Althea brushed a black curl off her eyebrow as she checked the crowd. She was destined to be stuck with an elegant moniker, and so was he. Once, she remembered with a faint sigh, she had particularly liked a chap named Sam—but of course he had become a Derek. Sam had had bulging biceps and a busted nose, but it hadn't kept him from stirring up a bit of inventiveness between the covers. Derek, on the other hand, had spent hours gazing into her eyes and murmuring (bleating) endearments that were supposed to sweep her off her feet. Sam's approach was brisker—and a hell of a lot more interesting.

The mother-in-law was snivelling down her nose. "Where is my son, Althea? Have you already managed to . . . distract him from his duties as host?"

Althea thought of several snappy remarks but again found herself in an awkward curtsy. "No, ma'am. I haven't seen him since—"

Since what? It was impossible to keep track of the convoluted framework. Since he rescued her? Married her? Raped her? Jared would never do such a thing, she amended sourly. No doubt he had kept her from being raped by one of the marauding highwaymen that accosted virgins. Considering Jared, it might have been more fun to be accosted . . .

"Well, Althea," the mother-in-law snorted in a well-bred voice,



"you must feel most fortunate to have snared my son. He is, after all, the owner of this charming manor and of all the land from here to the cliffs. And you, a penniless orphan, destined to become a scullery maid—had not heaven intervened on your behalf."

Sam's mother was a cheery drunkard who was still producing babies on an annual basis. This one had probably produced Jared by virgin birth. Forget that; birth was messy. Jared had no doubt simply appeared one day, lisping French and nibbling cucumber sandwiches under his nanny's approving smile.

Althea swallowed an angry response. Fluttering her thick lashes, she murmured, "Yes, ma'am, I was most fortunate to have met your son. When my father died, leaving me a penniless orphan at the mercies of my unscrupulous uncle, I feared for my life." Melodrama, pure and nauseating. Why couldn't she have been a barmaid? A bit of slap and giggle in the shadows behind the stables, a feather bed to keep warm for a guy like Sam. But instead she had to hang around with the aristocracy. Snivellers and snorters, bah!

But there was no point in worrying about this Jared fellow. Maybe he was a Sam in disguise. Maybe chickens had lips, and the moon was made of green cheese. Maybe it was time to start expecting the Easter bunny to show up with a bunch of purple eggs.

The mother-in-law person stood up imperiously and held a lace handkerchief to her nose. "I am going into the garden for a bit of fresh air," she announced. "Send Jared to me when he appears, Althea. I must speak to him; it is of the greatest importance."

Hmmm? Had the old bat noticed her repeated glances at the diamond brooch? If she were to tattle to this Jared person, Althea might find herself scrubbing pots after all. It seemed prudent to assume the dutiful role.

"Please don't take a chill, Lady Excrutia," Althea said in a solicitous whine. "Shall I fetch a shawl for you from your dressing room? Allow me to bring it to you in the garden."

The dowager with the plumes beamed approvingly at Althea's meek posture. "Charming child, just charming. But look, here's Jared!"

Oh, hell. Althea tried to forget about the promised encounter in the garden—for a few minutes anyway. Forcing herself into a semblance of pleased surprise, she lifted her eyes to meet those of the unknown Jared.

Oh, my God, she thought with a scowl. Another arrogant one. There went another bodice, ripped into shreds. Endless lovemaking, with nothing but simmering frustration as the result. And those granite gray eyes boring into her, for God's sake! It was more than anyone should have to bear . . . it really was.

“**D**amnedest thing I’ve ever seen!” The lieutenant leaned against the kitchen counter, watching the body being wheeled out of the tiny office. For the first time in his career even the paramedics were subdued.

The two men waited for the medical examiner to finish wiping the inky smudges off his hands, then crowded into the room. The desk was cluttered with notebooks, chewed pencil stubs, and an overflowing ashtray. A lipstick-stained coffee cup lay on the floor in a dried brown puddle. A typewriter hummed softly, and with a snort the second of the plainclothes detectives leaned over to switch it off.

“How’d you discover the body?” the medical examiner asked. Like Lady Macbeth, he seemed obsessed with the invisible marks on his hands, rubbing them against each other nervously.

“The woman in the next apartment called the super. It seems the woman who lived here was a writer, and the neighbor was used to the sound of the typewriter clattering all day long. She told the super the last couple of days there was no sound, and it was driving her crazy,” the first detective said.

The second snorted again. “If I lived next door to one of these writers, and had to listen to that noise all day, I might have strangled the broad myself. As it is, I have to listen to my wife screaming at the kids every night and—”

“Damnedest thing,” the first repeated, shaking his head. “In twenty-nine years on the force, I’ve seen a lot of weird things—but I’ve never seen anyone strangled with a typewriter ribbon.”

The medical examiner laughed. “As good as a wire or a rope, but a hell of a lot messier. All you have to do now is find someone with ink-stained hands.”

The second detective was reading the titles of the paperback books on a shelf above the desk. “Look at this, Carl. Do you know what the victim wrote? Romance novels, by damn! You know the things: *Sweet Moonlight*, *The Towering Passion of Lady Bianca*, etc., etc.”

“My wife reads that stuff,” the first admitted. He shook his head.

"I dunno why, though. Gimme a good ball game on television and a six pack to keep me cool. That's my idea of romance—me, Budweiser, and the Yankees."

The medical examiner raised his hand in a farewell gesture. "I'll get back to you in a day or two, Carl. Don't waste your time reading the victim's books—unless you think the intellectuals of the world conspired to do her in!" Chuckling to himself, he left the two detectives exchanging glances.

"Naw, Carl," the second said, "don't get your hopes up. It was a prowler or something. Let's go talk to the doorman and the elevator operator."

The first sighed, thinking of the tedious interviews that would prove necessary, the trivial gossip that the neighbors would feel obliged to share, the dinner he would not have a chance to eat that night.

"Too bad it wasn't a suicide," he grumbled. "My wife always makes meatballs on Mondays and then goes bowling with a bunch of the girls. Good game on tonight."

"Then we'd have our note," the second added, pointing at a piece of paper sticking out of the typewriter. "But nobody, not even dippy romance writers, can strangle themselves. My money's on the neighbor; she's probably half-deaf from the noise. She just couldn't stand the sound of the typewriter any longer and went berserk. I would've."

"She's eighty-three," the first one said. He leaned over to read the manuscript page, then straightened up. "My wife will get a kick out of this, you know. Yours will, too. All women think this stuff is great—all the damned moonlight and wine and deep soulful stares! It spoils them for the real world, Marv."

"Yeah, my wife wanted me to take her out to dinner for her birthday. Hell, the babysitter drives a damn Mercedes! I can't see spending half a week's salary on fancy food."

"So what'd you do?" Carl asked as they went out the door of the office and started for the living room.

The one named Marv shrugged his shoulders. "I brought home a real nice pizza."

**L**ady Althea wrapped her arms around Sam's stocky waist and snuggled against him, ignoring the black smudges on his back from her previous caresses. For a long time, the horse's rhythmic clops were the only sound on the road. The moon

illuminated the trees on either side of them with a silver haze, and the light breeze had an earthy redolence. At last the horse and its two riders were gone into the darkness, although a faint giggle seemed to linger in the air.

Back at the cold and lifeless manor house, the ball was over. The nameless gentility had disappeared, the orchestra vanished, the vast room as quiet as a tomb. In the center of the room lay a body. Two arrogant eyes stared at the darkened chandelier, unblinking and glazed with faint surprise. Blood had long since coagulated on the gash across his neck.

There was more blood in the garden. The figure there had the same surprised expression, and a similar slash across the neck. The bosom no longer heaved, although it had the appearance of a mountain range arising from the manicured lawn. The surface of this alpine region was smooth, except for a tiny rip in its surface where a broach had been removed hastily and without regard for the crinoline fabric.

His majesty's guards remained puzzled by the scene for a few weeks, then dismissed it from their minds. One or two of the younger ones sometimes mentioned it over pints of ale in the new roadhouse, but the older officers usually ignored them. The barmaid, always full of throaty laughter and ready for a frolic, kept them more amused on the feather beds upstairs.

---

## **SOLUTION TO THE FEBRUARY "UNSOLVED":**

---

Tess: red, west, 9:00

Maria: blue, east, 10:00

Enid: green, north, 11:00

Carmen: yellow, south, 12:00

FICTION

# Takeout Order

by Robert L.  
Zimler



Illustration by Jim Odbert

LICENSE TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

---

---

**B**y rights I should be telling this to a priest in the confession box at St. Anselmo's. But I'm afraid to trust even a priest to know that I killed three mobsters yesterday and got away with it, exactly the way I planned. I guess I could trust my father and mother, but this is too heavy a thing to lay on them.

So I'm writing it out, for me to read over and over. I've got to figure out what this is going to do to my life. After all, I'm only seventeen and I've got a lot of living to do yet.

I'm not the least bit sorry about it. The only thing I'm sorry about is that I didn't do it for Julio. I should have done it for him, but I did it only to save my own skinny neck. Julio was my best friend, my only friend. Him and me, two kids from the barrio, two nobody Puerto Rican teenagers born right here in New York.

We didn't get to be friends until the start of the last year in high school. He was in a couple of my classes, but about the only notice I took of him was that he had one of the most punk haircuts of anybody in school. But one day he walked up to me and said, "You mind if I start hanging around with you, man? I like your style."

"I got no style," I said. "What you see is what you get."

"Man, you get A's in everything and you talk as good as any Anglo. I'm gonna learn stuff from you." He was serious. "When I do, I'm gonna change my name, maybe even make my hair blond. I want to pass for a dude that's never been north of 96th Street in his life." He touched the side of his face. "My vacations in Bermuda is how I got this nice tan."

"You're out of your skull," I answered. "You want to hang around me, I guess I can stand it. But you got more to lose than me. Nobody is going to talk to you either."

He grinned. "What do you expect, showing up the rest of us? The teachers are always telling us we could be just like you if we worked harder. That don't bother me none. You want to, we could be friends." He pulled his hand back a little, ready to slap palms on it.

"Not until you take off that fake gold earring," I answered. "That and your punk haircut. I can't stand anything fake, your side or mine."

"A deal, man," he said.

He was no clown but he was fun to be with. He'd get high on the least little thing—say, two squirrels in the schoolyard battling over a piece of sandwich he tossed them—like it was Fourth of July fireworks at

night over the Hudson River. He was always making big plans and dropping them for something better. I dragged him to see *King Lear* in Central Park, he decided to become an actor—I think it was mainly the costumes that got to him. A new girl came into class and he fell in love so hard he couldn't talk of anything else. A week later, he was ready to leave her to join the Air Force.

I gave him a lot, too. I didn't try to get him to study all the useless school junk that I did. I just worked on getting him to speak English instead of street jive. When I corrected him, he'd grin and say, "Keep it up, man. I'm learning. One of these days, you'll think you're hearing Robert Redford talking."

He got worried one day when everybody started talking about graduation. "Ernesto, what's going to happen? I guess you'll go to college, huh? Me, even if they let me, I can't take any more school."

I got sore because that's where it had been digging at me for a long time. "Don't play idiot, Julio. You can figure out what my father makes as a counterman in that diner and why my mother works in the supermarket part time. I got to work to help out, same as you."

"What kind of job you going to look for, Ernesto?"

I tried to sound cool. "How much choice you offering me, Julio? I'll probably end up a delivery boy for one of those fancy East Side groceries. With my nice talk and good manners, I ought to make it big on tips."

"Aw, come on," he protested. "That's a job for me, not you."

"Well, maybe one of those swanky Fifth Avenue department stores is ready for a Puerto Rican. Men's hosiery, that's an easy place to start. What type, sir? Nylon, wool, or French lisle? Yes, we have some nice imported silk—this way, please."

Julio didn't say anything for a while. Then he said softly, "If I had the guts, I'd be ripping off handbags from old ladies in apartment house elevators. The money ain't bad."

I didn't answer him. He went on, real quiet. "The real money is in pushing. Some of those guys clear two, three thousand a month. A couple of months like that and I'd be wearing silk suits and driving a yellow sports car."

I shrugged. "Then what are you still hanging around school for? Go ahead, do it. You don't need your diploma for that."

He looked straight at me, defiantly. "I ain't got the guts for it, Ernesto. I'm not just afraid of ending up in the can. I don't even want to get busted. I don't



want to stand in front of some judge with my hands cuffed behind my back while my lawyer is trying to work out a deal with some assistant D.A. I seen that.”

“Then that’s it.”

“You don’t understand what I’m getting at, Ernesto. If you’re up to any of that stuff, I’ll stick with you even if I’m scared all the time. I want to stay teamed up with you.”

“I’d be more scared than you,” I said. “We’ll just do what our folks do. We take any job we can get, we buy ten, fifteen lottery tickets every week. Then we pray every Sunday to the Virgin Mary or our favorite saint for help in picking the right numbers.”

Graduation was on a Friday night in the school auditorium. I gave the valedictory address, starting with the usual stuff about being grateful to our parents and teachers and ending with how the world needed an end to war.

When the principal handed me my diploma, he made a little speech about my outstanding scholastic record and presented me with the Alumni Club’s fifty dollar award check for “diligent scholarship and high personal character.” All the parents and about six students, including Julio, applauded.

Saturday I shot the whole fifty, treating my family to a

meal at Burger King. Then I took them to 86th Street and let them pick out presents for themselves, nothing over five bucks. My father lent me a few bucks more to get my mom the fake pearl necklace she kept looking at.

Sunday we went to church. Monday morning, Julio and I began our careers—pedaling bikes all over Manhattan for a messenger service. We operated out of the basement of a big office building in midtown. Mr. Riley, who ran it, used to be a messenger himself. The pay wasn’t bad, better than a lot of jobs, and he was fair about paying overtime.

For me, simple. All I had to do was not lose the package or envelope—a videotaped commercial, legal papers, a manuscript—and get there more or less on time.

But for Julio, it was like he had made Air Force jet pilot. He acted like it was an Olympics event with him going for the world record, running stoplights, shooting between double-parked trucks, swerving across three lanes at a time to gain ten yards. At first the cops used to curse him, but he’d only grin back. After a while they waved at him.

Even with pitching in regular to our families, we had fair money for ourselves. I actually

started a savings account at the bank in our building lobby. Julio kept his in tens and twenties inside the hollow of a plastic model of the Statue of Liberty.

I had been thinking about it to myself, but Julio said it first. "How about giving ourselves and our families a break? Let's get a place of our own. Your kid sister could graduate from that cot in your kitchen to a real bed. And we'd have someplace better than parked cars or rooftops to take girls."

We did it, four floors up in a tenement in Alphabet City, between Avenues B and C, but more space to ourselves than we'd ever had in our lives. It was great until the next part happened.

Julio was out on a run someplace. I had gotten tired of waiting for him, so I started eating my lunch in the office alone—the usual stuff I got from one of the pushcarts on the block.

When Julio did get in, he didn't say hello or anything. He just went to the desk and handed over his delivery receipts to Mr. Riley. Then he grabbed my arm and pulled me outside to the entrance we use, next to the freight platform.

He was shaking with excitement and talked in a whisper even though nobody was around. "I just saw two guys get murdered. Honest to God, not more 'n fifteen, twenty feet away. I

think it was a mob takeout for sure."

I got a little excited too. "Where was all this?"

"I swear, Ernesto, it was like I was watching a movie. Everything was sharp and clear, like in slow motion, like an instant replay."

"So what happened?"

"It was right outside that classy restaurant on Second Avenue, Frascini's, the one with that big green canopy. I had just gotten through dropping off some blueprints for the architects in the building next door. You been there, too," he reminded me. "So I'm unchain-ing my bike from the standpipe when this big limo glides up to the curb and stops at the canopy. Naturally I watch to see what kind of bigshots are going to get out."

Julio stopped to catch his breath, then went on, still whispering. "Out steps this guy, short, dressed expensive, about forty, fifty years old. Kind of cocky, I guess, like he knows the headwaiter is going to fuss over him and he's gonna eat the most expensive lunch in the place.

"I don't know where the two hoods came from—probably they were standing in the doorway of the restaurant. I only saw them when the guy who got out of the limo noticed them. He

prised. He says, 'What are you guys doing so far uptown? Got time to join me for—'

Julio paused to make sure I was paying attention. "That's as far as he got. They started blasting. They were only a few feet away, they couldn't miss. They had silencers. It wasn't loud, more like somebody clapping hands. They must have gotten off six or seven shots between 'em. He went down right away, just made a little hiccupping noise."

"It's so fast the driver of the limo is only just beginning to open his door to get out. One of the hoods yanks the door open the rest of the way, the other hood steps up and fires right into the car. The driver never does get out, he just goes over sideways on the seat. That was it—it's all over."

Julio pointed his finger at me. "You're not going to believe what happens next. They jump into the getaway car waiting with the motor running and take off, right? Wrong. These are cool, real cool, guys. They just put up their guns and walk away. They split up, one goes away from me and around the corner, goodbye. The other one comes my way, passes me, not looking at me or anybody else, just a pedestrian on his way somewhere."

"No crowd, no cop pushing through to see what all the ex-

citement is about?" I asked.

Julio shook his head. "No nothing. Just a guy laying on the sidewalk in a small, a real small, puddle of blood. But you want to know who got the hell outta there in a hurry? It was the people who saw it. A dozen or so, they disappeared so fast it was like a magician vanishing act on TV. Less than a minute everybody's gone but two guys who ain't going anywhere but the cemetery."

That woke me up. "You said less than a minute it was all over? Right?"

"Yeah. A guy gets out of a limo, two hoods walk up to him, clap, clap, clap, the guy is down. Clap, clap, the driver—maybe he's a bodyguard too—is finished. The program is over, time for the commercials."

I looked him in the eye. "Then how come," I asked quietly, "you were thirty minutes late getting back to the office? You were so damn late I started eating lunch without you."

Julio hesitated. "You'll think I did something dumb."

"That wouldn't be the first time and it won't be the last time. Get on with it. You went to the cops and told 'em you could identify the killers?"

"You crazy, man?" he protested. "You think if I pick those guys out of a lineup I'm gonna live to go to court? A lot of good solid citizens saw it,

some of them up closer than me. Let them be witnesses. My mother had a son who might be a little stupid sometimes, but an absolute idiot he ain't."

"Then where'd you go?" I insisted.

He watched me as he talked, waiting for me to get angry. I said nothing. "I was just interested where those hoods went, what they did next. So I hopped on my bike and went around the corner, after the first guy. I spotted him easy. He heads for a car that's double-parked half-way down the block. A dark blue Caddy, last year's model. He hops in and off it goes."

"That's still not half an hour," I said grimly. "What's the rest of it?"

"I stayed with the car. At the corner, it gets stopped by the traffic light. I'm close enough to read the license plate easy, so I write it down on the back of one of my receipt slips. I handed it in to Mr. Riley just now, along with the rest."

"Still not a half hour," I said.

"The light changes, the car went around the corner, me with it. The next corner, again it turns, now it's going the other way, practically back to where it happened. Sure enough, there's the second hood, standing on the sidewalk, waiting. The car picks him up."

"You didn't quit right then

and there," I said, "because you were getting a charge out of it, right?" I was trying to keep it light but I was beginning to smell what was ahead.

"Well, the way they headed, I knew they were going to get on the southbound East River Drive. So I—"

I groaned. "No bikes allowed on the Drive. You might as well have clomped after them on six foot stilts dressed in a circus clown's costume."

"Right. But I figured if they took the outside lane, they couldn't spot me in back of them, all the way over in the right lane. If they picked the middle or the right lane, I'd have quit. They took the fast lane on the left. So I kept 'em company."

He was getting nervous remembering and said nothing for a while. When he started again, it was in a different voice. "Suddenly they shot way over to make the next exit. That should have made me suspicious. Why would they go to all that trouble of taking the Drive only to go one exit?"

"It was 23rd Street. There's that big apartment development there, five or six big buildings with a big lawn and trees in front, practically a park. Their car is moving along, a nice easy thirty miles an hour, then bingo! It does a nosedive

emergency stop and me, instead of being six, eight car-lengths back, I'm almost on top of 'em. I'm only like thirty feet away when one of them jumps out, his gun is already in his hand, and he's shooting at me."

Julio was trembling. "When I saw that guy get out, I jumped the bike onto the sidewalk and across the lawn. My head was down so low my chin was on the handlebars. I was pumping that bike like my life depended on it." He stopped, hit by the truth of his own words. "I guess it did, didn't it, Ernesto? That guy wasn't firing to scare me off. That son of a bitch was aiming straight at me. He wanted to kill me."

Julio got the shakes. I held him until it stopped. He picked up and went on. "I whizzed along all those twisty walks between the buildings, no car could get in there. When I came out, it was a whole avenue away. And getting back here, I used all the one-way streets the wrong way. They couldn't have followed me."

It was almost like he was bragging how good he was on a bike. I didn't want to tell him, but it could be fatal if I didn't. "Julio," I said, "it's okay and it's going to stay that way. There's just one thing. Your bike, like all the rest of ours, has a little sign in back, right under the

saddle, that says 'Laser Messengers' along with the phone number here. We'd better pray that when you whipped around, they were too far away to read it."

It was like I hit him on the side of his head with a tire iron. He whimpered. "Oh, God, I forgot about it. They'll be here for sure."

He kept on like that and I kept on trying to slow him down. "Easy, Julio. There's a dozen different things we can do—I just got to figure out which one is best. We'd better get back inside. I need to sit quiet for a while and figure this thing out."

When we went in, the boss said, "Where you guys been? Things are stacking up. Get going."

I told him, "Julio's sick. It's in his gut. I think maybe it's appendicitis. He's got to stay off his feet. And I'm staying right here with him, Mr. Riley: He don't get better, I'm taking him to the hospital."

Mr. Riley had a bunch of pickup slips in his hand, but he saw how Julio looked. "Okay, if you want, I'll call my doctor to see if he can take him."

We sat there, me working on it. One thing was sure—the cops were out. If Julio asked for protection, he'd have to explain. Then he'd become the

D.A.'s prize witness, guaranteed good for one trip into the East River with a rock tied to his feet.

When I stopped panicking myself, it didn't look so bad. I told Julio, "You can quit sweating, little brother. All we have to do is hole you up for a couple of weeks. If those guys see the cops aren't out looking for them, if there's nothing about them on TV or in the papers, they'll know you're not talking. They're not going to try to knock you off if they know you're keeping your mouth shut."

I kept pushing that at Julio. I really believed it myself. Finally he looked at me. Like he was a five-year-old kid, he asked, "You really mean it, Ernesto? You're not just trying to make me feel better?"

That was when Lovejoy came in. He went straight for Julio. He's six foot nine and he had made All-City high school forward but wasn't good enough for a college basketball scholarship. So now he's a bike messenger, goodbye to four free years at some college with spending money and a new car, not to mention a shot at a pro contract at a quarter of a million a year.

Lovejoy was sore but he kept his voice down. He was the color of coal-ash. "Man," he cried, "what you done? You crossed

some drug dealer? You tryin' to beat out some loan shark? There's one mean mother of an enforcer out there looking to find you. I gotta go back out there and give him your address."

Julio could barely squeeze out his words. "They're here already, Ernesto," he said to me. "God."

"You be quiet," I told him. "Talk, Lovejoy."

Lovejoy turned his anger on me. "You damn right I'll talk. You guys don't care what trouble you get other folks into."

"What trouble you talking about?"

"A gun stuck under my chin to help me answer questions, that's all."

"Talk sense, man," I said calmly.

"I was just coming in here, wheeling my bike down the ramp—the next thing I know somebody slams me against the wall hard. Before I know what's happening, he's got a gun under my chin with one hand, his other hand keeps me flat up against the wall.

"Then this mother says, 'You big black bastard, listen good. I say things only one time. You answer me what I ask and you'll walk away, fine, we're still friends. But the first wise or dumbass answer you try, no argument from me—I'll just

blow the top of your thick skull off.”

Lovejoy looked at me defiantly. “I was scared, just like he expected, and he knew it. I told him what he wanted. You think you’d have done different?”

“What the hell did he want to know?” I said.

“He says, ‘You got a wiseass Latino working here—he’s wearing an orange T-shirt and grey sweatpants. What’s his name?’ I told him that must be Julio. Then he wants to know where Julio lives and who he lives and talks with, like his folks or some girl or what.”

Lovejoy looked abashed. “I had to give him your name, Ernesto. I told him you buddied together and shared an apartment but that I never been there. All I knew was that it was in the East Village someplace. So he says, ‘You got five minutes to go in there and bring the address out to me. Or it’s your ass.’”

“No sweat,” I told Lovejoy. “Me and Julio aren’t going back there. We’re flying out of here tonight. Florida or if we got enough fare, Puerto Rico.”

“Hold up,” said Lovejoy. “The next part is better. By then I was starting to get my cool back. When he asked what you looked like, Ernesto, I told him you was a fat guy with a long,

droopy mustache and you always wore a flowered shirt with loud color cotton pants.” He grinned. “I was remembering some wimpy teacher from school.”

“You did real good, Lovejoy. Now go give him the address.” I handed it to him on a piece of paper. “You’re terrific.”

He was pleased. “I got pride, man. I’m a competitor, pro material for the big leagues.” He went out and was back promptly.

“He took off,” he reported. “But I been warned not to tell you guys or anybody anything.” Then, very soberly, he added, “If you guys ain’t gone tonight, then I be gone tomorrow. I ain’t hanging around for him to find out there’s an Ernesto working here but he don’t look like what I told him.”

“I told you, we’ll be gone tonight. Now get over to Mr. Riley, he’s ready to have a fit we’re talking so long and he’s got customers waiting.” Lovejoy shook my hand, pressing some bills into it. “That’s to help with your airfare. I can spare it easy.”

Julio could hardly wait for him to be gone. “We really going to Florida or Puerto Rico?” he whispered.

“No. And we’re not telling anybody where we’re going. I already had it figured out what we had to do when Lovejoy



crashed in on us. Here's the deal: They got a good look at you. But if Lovejoy's telling the truth—I say he is—they know you got a friend named Ernesto but they don't know what I look like. So I'm going out of here and coming back with stuff to change your looks. Then we both leave here, safe like a baby that momma's carrying to church Sunday morning."

I could see Julio wanted to believe me but was puzzled. "How, Ernesto?"

"You're going to be wearing the same clothes as every office worker in this building. Shirt, tie, slacks, jacket. Shoes, no more sneakers. And some goo to fix your hair different. A pair of glasses, too—not dark ones, just regular glasses. You'll practically pass for an Anglo like you've always wanted."

"They'll spot me as soon as I stick my face out of here," he answered. "It won't work."

"Sure, if we go out the back way we always do, next to the freight dock. But we're using that door—" I pointed to the heavy fireproof door at the back of the basement "—to get to the freight elevator. We take it up, get out on any floor we like. Then we use one of the regular passenger elevators to get down to the lobby.

"We do it a couple of minutes past five, going-home time. The

elevators and the lobby are mobbed, we just move along with the crowd, out the front doors, and down into the subway. Okay?"

Julio's eyes glistened. "I'm glad I got you for a friend, Ernesto."

"There's one more part and that's up to you, Julio. We can't stay with our folks. That's the first place they'll look if they don't find us at the apartment. They got plenty of connections in the barrio they can use to find us. You know somebody living someplace else that'll put you up for a couple of weeks without telling everybody about it?"

He thought for a bit. "Rosalie Munoz. I hung out with her for a while. Now she's got a place up in Washington Heights she shares with some other girl who works for the phone company. She's a good-hearted kid."

"Then we're set. Now I'm going out to get your clothes. We still got a couple of hours to kill until five o'clock. You stay put. I'll be back no later than four thirty. You still play sick, understand? You're better, if Riley asks, but you still get a pain in your side once in a while."

He nodded. I went over to Mr. Riley. "Julio's a lot better," I reported. "But he shouldn't be moving around yet. I know

you're jammed up with calls, so give me some. But I got to take an hour off for myself. It's important."

He didn't argue but picked out a bunch of calls close together so I could knock them off in a hurry.

I left, but first I went to the bank and took out all my money. You want to play games in this town, you'd better be ready with money.

I got done with the calls fast and raced down to those cheapie stores on 14th Street. I didn't waste my time shopping around, I just bought the first things I came across. There was a stand heaped up with ready-made prescription glasses, the way I'd remembered, and I added a pair for Julio.

With two full shopping bags hanging from my handlebars, I started back to the office. I was ahead of schedule and satisfied I'd done good. But when I spotted three police cars in front of our building, I knew. I took my time going around to the freight entrance.

The phone was ringing in our office, but there was nobody there to answer it. The place was empty. I didn't wait for the freight elevator. I used the stairs and came out in the hall that's hidden behind the lobby by a pair of fancy bronze doors.

They were there—cops,

building guards, a few guys in civilian clothes, most of the messengers, Mr. Riley. They were standing around in a sort of circle and I pushed through. It was on the floor, something covered with a painter's drop-cloth.

When Mr. Riley saw me, he pulled me to one side and put an arm around my shoulder. "It's Julio," he said. "It must have been some crazy who did it. One of the guards found him right there a little while ago."

"I begged you not to let him leave until I got back," I said angrily. I wasn't crying or anything.

Mr. Riley got upset. "In the name of all that's holy, don't blame me. He told me he was okay but he couldn't stand waiting any more. He said for me to tell you he was going to Rosalie's, you'd know who he meant."

Then it hit. I got sweaty and pale but one of the detectives saved me from passing out by getting tough with me. At first what he was saying sounded like it was coming from far away, but when it got into my head, it helped by making me angry. "You his roommate? We been waiting for you, so don't waste any more of our time. Start talking or you're going to be in more trouble than you could imagine. You and your

buddy there been dealing drugs, right?"

Another detective stepped over. "This was no crazy that did it, some nut pointing a gun at the first person he comes across and pulling the trigger. This was professional, two or three bullets in the back of the head. See for yourself." He started to pull the cover off Julio.

I turned my back. "The hell with you," I said. "I know what he looked like alive. I don't want to see him dead." He was probably trying to shock me into babbling anything I knew.

The first detective kept it up. "You deal a little drugs, just on the side, maybe? You get around to a lot of offices, you sell a dime bag here, a nickel bag there. You forgot to pay off your source, you shot all the money, maybe lost it on the horses. He got sore—that it?"

I deliberately worked the anger. It helped. "You're a bunch of stupid bastards, you don't even know what pushers look like. They got money, they got cars, they got everything." By this time, I was shouting and it felt good. "Me and Julio, all we know is working our asses off, pushing our bikes, any kind of weather, rain, shine, hot, cold, and we still got nothing."

I went on raving like that but the detective didn't get sore.

"Calm down, kid," he said. "I know you feel bad, but most of the time in setups like this it's drugs."

Mr. Riley was great. "All of my boys are clean," he said. "They're bonded, that means they been checked by the insurance company for arrest records. I don't take school dropouts, either. I got a business to protect. The least thing out of line and out they go."

"I'm going back to the office to leave my receipts and then I'm going home," I announced to nobody in particular. "Have a nice day, everybody."

Mr. Riley stopped me. "Take a couple of days off, Ernesto. Maybe going to church will help. An extra prayer for Julio wouldn't hurt." I nodded and went down to the office.

My brain didn't give me any choice of what to think about. All by itself, it kept switching back and forth from what Julio looked like now to how to stop them from putting two bullets in the back of my own head. Those two hit men were smarter than I had expected, covering both ways out of the basement, even the way we never used and where they caught Julio. I had more to be scared of than I first figured.

Lovejoy came down after me. "Get out the building this way," he said, "while the cops are still

around. And don't you never come back here. That'd be like a favor to me."

I took out the two tens he'd slipped me before and handed them back. "I don't need this. I've been to the bank and I'm set. It'd be nice to see you again someday on TV, scoring thirty points a game for the Knicks or the Nets."

"That's gone." He spoke with dignity. "I'll make it some way. I know I look ridiculous, a guy my height riding around town on a bike. I'll find something else." He turned to leave.

I stopped him. "Do me one more thing, Lovejoy. Tomorrow morning, bring me my bike. I can't take it with me now because I don't know yet where I'll be tonight."

"Where you want me to bring it?"

"How about that parking garage on the corner, two blocks down? I'll be inside, at the bottom of the ramp. Say a quarter to nine, nine at the latest."

"I be there, man."

He left and I had my chance to go through the slips on the boss's desk. I found it easily, the one Julio had turned in with the getaway car's plate number written on the back. Then I left a note clipped to one of the shopping bags. It told the guys to divvy up for themselves everything I'd bought for Julio.

I phoned my mother. I told her I was taking a good-paying job out of town for a few weeks, I'd be in touch. Then I took the subway to my widowed Aunt Prudencia, my mother's sister, out in Brooklyn. We always got along fine, and she was glad to let me stay at her place a while. I worried her, though, that I wouldn't let her tell my folks where I was, but she swore she'd do like I asked.

The next morning Lovejoy met me with my bike. "I'd buy us a cup of coffee," he said, "but I got to go. Things was left in a mess last night."

When he was out of sight, I took my bike around the corner and smashed it against a fire hydrant. I did it a few times until it looked the way I wanted. A couple of people passing by stopped to watch me, but nobody said anything. Then I dragged it back to the avenue.

I didn't even have to flag down the squad car. It came cruising along slowly and when they saw me, they pulled over. The one nearest me, the one we called Tex, rolled his window down. "I heard this morning," he said. "Tough. I got a kick out of the way that kid whizzed through traffic. But in the beginning, I swear I nearly busted him for reckless endangerment. What happened is bad. No way to say otherwise."

He looked at my wrecked bike. "What happened to you?"

"A guy in a blue Caddy sideswiped me going around a corner. The bastard knew he hit me, but he never stopped."

"You're lucky he didn't break your legs," he commented.

"I got his plate number. I want to get him to pay for it. That bike set me back eighty dollars, ten bucks a week out of my pay." I had a twenty ready in my hand and passed it to him. "Do me a favor, I need the name and address of the owner."

He handled it straight-faced. Turning to his partner at the wheel, he said, "Not even ten A.M. and we already made an extra ten apiece." He handed the money back. "I'm not claiming I can't be had, kid, just not that cheap. You want a make on the car, it's a freebie. Gimme the plate number."

He called it in on his radio. "The wait is on this end for somebody to punch it into the computer," he explained. "The computer in Albany don't take more than a couple of seconds to print it out back here." After a minute or two, his radio squawked back and he started writing on his pad. He tore off the sheet and handed it to me. "There's your blue Caddy. It's owned by a company, the Reo Trading Company, with somebody named J. Vanni, treas-

urer, signing on it. You got the address there."

I dumped my ruined bike on top of a trash can. The address, all the way west on Canal Street, was one of those run down office buildings, only six, seven stories high. At the back of the faded lobby was one of those old fashioned wrought-iron elevator cages. Next to it, an old black guy was sitting on a chair reading a comic book.

I gave him the standard greeting. "What's happening, man?"

He wasn't surly, just too old to care. "What do you want?"

I went through the story about wanting to collect from the guys who wrecked my bike. He pointed to the building directory on the wall with the names in little white plastic letters, only they were yellowing with age.

"There they is, Reo Trading, top floor, 601. First door on your left soon as you step outta the elevator. The blue Caddy you talkin' about, they keep it in that parking lot across the street," he volunteered.

"They in, Pops?"

"Just took 'em up." He stood up, put down his comic book carefully on the chair. He waved me closer. "Don't you be so certain you want me to take you up there, sonny," he said confidentially. "You more likely

get kneecapped than collect any green stuff outta them." His voice dropped lower. "They bagmen for the mob. Two of 'em. The other one, the short guy, he the wheelman."

"You putting me on, Pops?"

"They been here quite a while. I hears them talking, I knows what they talking about even if they don't say it straight out. All day they out collecting. From all kinds of businesses the mob runs." He added, "They mean. Sometimes they braggin' about it, they don't take no fear of an old black man listenin'."

I offered him one of the candy bars I had in my pocket for my lunch. He nodded. "I eat it later." He stuck it in his flabby pants. He was enjoying talking, especially to a kid impressed by his inside information. "Don't call me Pops. Call me Charlie. That's not my name, but that's what everybody calls me."

"They here every day, Charlie?"

"They come in ten, eleven. They don't get no mail, they don't send out mail. Just sit around, playing cards mostly. Then they order up stuff from the takeout place on the corner. After that, they gone for the day. Where they carry what they pick up, I don't rightly know. I got me a suspicion they haul it someplace over to Brooklyn."

"Charlie, you did me a favor, tipping me off not to mix it with those hoods."

He nodded. "They mean mothers. They don't take their guns off, even when they having a bath." He chuckled.

That bit about their having their lunch brought in sounded good to me. I walked to the corner and looked the takeout place over. The sign said GEORGE'S TAKEOUT KITCHEN.

Even outside you knew it was a sleaze joint. Inside, there was a long food counter with a glass front and glass shelf on top, a few self-service tables, and a cashier's booth next to the front door, just big enough for the guy standing in it. "You the boss?" I asked him.

He looked me over carefully, ranking me. "Maybe," he said. "What do you want?"

"You need a delivery boy?"

"I got one," he answered. "You think I been waiting for you to come along?"

I'd seen his type before. With the customers, he'd be so greasy friendly you'd need to wipe it off with a towel. But with the people who worked for him, who couldn't afford to quit—like immigrants without the right color card to work—he'd squeeze the living guts out of them. So I knew how to handle him.

"Maybe part time for the rush during the lunch hours," I sug-

gested. "I just quit my bike messenger job, I nearly got killed by a car. Somebody promised me a night job, ushering at a movie house. But I gotta have a little more eating money. Even a couple of hours would be great."

He didn't answer right away. It was so easy to read his brain I could have laughed. He was figuring how little he could offer without me walking away. That type, once he named his price, he'd never admit he made a mistake by having to raise it.

I helped him. "You can pay me off the books. That's okay by me."

With that as bait, he took the hook all the way. Off the books he didn't even have to pay the minimum wage. Now it was his turn to do the persuading. "This ain't like a messenger job," he said. "You can't expect it on the wages, you gotta make it on the tips. I'll give you five bucks for three hours, eleven thirty to two thirty. You hustle, you'll earn yourself twenty, thirty dollars tips. All yours, no deductions, no withholding."

So he'd be sure he got the best of me, I pleaded. "For three hours, make it ten bucks. That's not too much."

He shook his head. "That's it, Paco. You get a free meal, I throw that in. Every day when you finish, you sit down and eat

what you like, only no beer. Now write down your name and address here." He took out a little ledger from under the counter and opened it to a back page.

I wrote in my real name and address. That was important for later. He read it and said, "I'm gonna call you Paco. That's an easier name for everybody. You come in tomorrow before eleven, I gotta teach you the setup here."

"You bet," I said enthusiastically. "I'll be here early."

For the first time, I felt I was going to have a real shot at it. So getting up to the barrio was next. I went looking for a guy I once knew from school. Somewhere along his way, he got lost and was now both a pusher and a user.

Everybody knew where he hung out. He remembered me. "The man you want owns a bodega on 112th Street," he told me. "Ask for Luis. Him and his wife are there 'most all the time." He found a scrap of paper in his pocket and he drew a little moonface on it. "If you don't show him this, he ain't gonna talk to you. That's worth twenty, Ernesto." I gave him the twenty.

The bodega was different from most; it was clean and neat. There was a middle-aged lady waiting on a customer. A nice-looking guy about fifty was un-



packing some groceries onto the shelves. I went up to the guy. "Luis?" I asked.

"I'm Luis." He stopped unpacking.

"A guy I know told me to give this to you," I said, handing him the piece of paper.

"What's your name?"

I made up some phony name.

"What can I do for you?" he asked politely.

I mouthed it rather than said it. "I need a gun."

He looked straight at me. When he spoke he didn't lower his voice, even with a customer being there. He was calm and clear, like he was talking into a microphone. Later, I figured out he thought he might be talking to an undercover stooge wired with a transmitter. "I got nothing to do with guns or anything else illegal. I run an honest business here and I collect a half-pay Police Department pension. I'm not dumb enough to spoil a good thing for my wife and me by breaking any law I heard of."

I was confused and looked it, standing there with no comeback. "What's your real name?" he asked finally.

This time I told him. He nodded. "That's the name I was waiting for. I got a phone call to expect you. Let's go in back." He pulled a curtain aside and we went into a small kitchen.

He sat me down at a table and poured us some coffee.

"What do you want a gun for?" he asked.

That broke me up. It was the first laugh I'd had in two days, but it lasted so long I knew I probably was a little hysterical.

He let me laugh myself out. Still pleasant, he asked, "What did I say funny?"

"How do you sell the guns if the customer has to tell you first what he's going to use it for? Do they tell you, 'I'm gonna kill my husband Saturday night because he's sleeping with another woman'? or, 'I'm gonna blow my landlord away because he wants to raise the rent again'?" I started laughing all over.

"You can make jokes but I don't," he said deliberately. "Most of my customers, they know what they're into and what they need—a cheap revolver, a sawed-off shotgun, whatever. But I was told you're a working stiff, not into anything."

He stopped to sip some coffee, then resumed more casually. "This is a double crooked business. What I do is illegal and my customers are all illegal, right? But I try to be honest. I mean I want to give you what's right for you, not what's biggest bucks for me. You understand?"

He was on the level, I felt. I said, "Let me think it over a minute. This would be the first time I'd have to say it out loud."

He waited and then added, "Don't tell me if you don't want to. I'll sell you anything you can pay for. But I want you to appreciate that I don't talk. If I did, I could get rich just from informer money."

"Honest, I believe you. But all I can tell you is I need a lot of firepower delivered fast. If it don't work the first time, I'm dead. I'm going up against professionals."

He nodded. "Let's go down to the basement."

At the back of the basement, there were two large refrigerators. They were wrapped around with heavy chain, secured with big padlocks. He unfastened them, opened the doors, and gestured for me to look inside.

Every shelf was loaded with guns, most of them wrapped loosely in little pieces of soft cloth. "Got a .357 Magnum?" I asked. "You hear a lot about that."

"Only in the movies." He unwrapped a gun and put it in my hand. "Clint Eastwood and Chuck Norris never use anything else. But nobody on the street does. Too heavy, too slow, and the recoil will ruin your aim," he explained.

"On TV, all the good guys use a Beretta. Is that a lot of hype, too?" I asked.

"They're terrific. The price is the only thing wrong with it. Fourteen hundred bucks. I keep one for show." He produced one. He took out another gun and held it side by side with the Beretta. "This is what people buy."

"What is it?"

"It's a Taurus automatic. It looks just like a Beretta, and it's not just its looks. It works as good. Same capacity, fifteen bullets in a clip plus one in the chamber. You can pull all sixteen shots off in six seconds and the recoil won't bother you."

"Then that's what I want. How much?"

He looked at me. "I'll give you a break. I usually get six hundred for it, once in a while I take five hundred. Four hundred for you."

"I want a silencer, too."

He found a silencer and some clips of cartridges. "This is a good one," he explained. "All you'll hear is like you slapped the palm of your hand easy against a wall. That's another hundred. How many clips you want?"

"Four," I said.

"Not unless you're planning a war. One to use, one to test out the gun, that's all you want."

I shook my head. "I never

fired a gun in my life. I'll need some practice. How about three clips? How much does that add?"

"One clip comes along with the gun. Another forty for two more clips. That's plenty."

I took the money belt out from under my shirt and counted out what I owed him. There wasn't much left. But all I needed now was a mouse and that should come cheap. "I like the way you do business," I said, "but I don't expect to be a repeat customer."

For the first time he smiled. "I like your style, kid. I wish you luck—I mean it." He packed my stuff into a brown paper bag. "Let's go back up. I'll finish packing this for you."

In the store he took a couple of boxes of crackers and a large can of tomatoes and stuck them in the bag on top. "Safest way to get your stuff home," he explained. "I got one more thing that might help."

From his cash register, he took out a business card. "This is a retired cop who runs a pistol club and practice range at an old frame house he has up in the Bronx. It's a long trip on the elevated up to Eastchester, but it might be worth it. He used to teach pistol shooting at the Police Academy. And he won't ask you if you got a pistol permit. Just tell him Luis sent you."

When I got back to my aunt's place, I hid my things inside a pair of boots she'd packed away until next winter. I gave her the crackers and the tomatoes. It turned out funny. She said, "Ernesto, what's the matter with you? You know I'm a diabetic. Crackers are poison for me." Next time I buy a handgun, I thought, I'll ask for the dietetic peaches she always has for dessert.

The next day I started my new job. I was handed a long apron to wear, with the words WE DELIVER—GEORGE'S TAKE-OUT printed on it. The other delivery boy was a kid fresh from El Salvador who could make change all right but knew only ten words of English. He didn't much like my getting a share of the tips, but there was nothing he could do about it.

Who delivered where was something I had to be patient about. The boss or the counterwoman handed out the stuff to deliver to whoever was free, me or the Salvadoran.

With just the two of us, it had to be an even chance each day that I'd be the one going up to the Reo Trading Company.

But it wasn't until my third day that I drew them. I was carrying them a pizza, a double order of eggplant parmigiana, and a six-pack of cold beer. Charlie, the old guy at the el-

evator, recognized me, but that was okay. "You deliverin' for that takeout place now?" he asked, a little surprised.

I had brought an extra can of beer for him. "That's to thank you, Charlie, for my getting this job. I wouldn't have known there was a takeout place that maybe could use me if you hadn't mentioned it."

"I done that? I don't rightly remember, but I appreciates the beer," he said. "Come on, I take you up before the pizza gets cold."

I was pretty uptight, going to meet those guys face to face. I knocked and walked in. There was a small front room, like for a receptionist, but it was empty. I went through its open door to the inside room. My legs were tingling like an electric shock traveling up and down.

The three of them were playing cards at a small table. They barely looked at me. One of them, a short guy, said, "Put it on the other table. Wait till we finish the hand." On the window ledge near them a cheap table radio was tuned to some tenor doing opera.

I put the food down on the table. It's not part of the job, but from the little bag that goes with every order, I laid out the paper plates, plastic spoons and forks, paper napkins, those little paper jiggers of salt and pep-

per. Meanwhile I was looking the place over.

It wasn't a real office, just a hangout. Besides the card table and the sort of dinette table I'd put the food on, there was one dinky desk with a phone on it. A couple of armchairs and a worn-out velvet sofa was the rest of it, except for big ashtrays full of butts.

They had the lights on, light-bulbs hanging from the ceiling. Without them it would have been too dark to play cards. There were big windows all right, two of them, but they both faced on a solid brick wall across a two foot airspace.

It wasn't until they came over to the food that they took any notice of me. One of them asked, "What happened to the other kid?" The short guy said, "Hey, look how nice he set out everything. That's nice, kid. What's your name?"

"The boss calls me Paco. Benny's still around, I just help out."

"Your turn to pay, Jimmy," the little guy said. "Give the kid an extra half buck for the way he laid out the table."

That made my tip two fifty, three big shots. Leaving, I felt better. Maybe they were smart by way of being killers, but they weren't Superman. They were just some pretty gross human animals, and they looked stupid.

The next day I got them again. This time I was cooler and ready for a little scouting. I had with me some extra handbill menus that we leave with every order. That was going to be my excuse for visiting the other offices on the floor. On one door, the name was SUPERIOR TWINE & CORD—MFGS. REPRESENTATIVES; nobody in. The next one was vacant, the front door closed but unlocked. I went in, looked around, but it was all bare walls—it didn't have anything I could use.

The last office on the floor was on the same side as my guys and next door to it. The front door said HANDCRAFT IMPORTS DE ECUADOR; nobody home there, either.

The next couple of times I delivered there, I kept trying, but they were never in at lunchtime. Charlie told me they were one-man outfits, not much more than salesmen, out all day scratching for business. They were almost never back before the end of the day when they took care of their paperwork.

I saved the men's room for my next trip. It was like I expected, all cracked or missing tiles and smelly, but I found something that made it a little easier. The paper towel box over the sink was empty and the little tin lock was broken, so its door hung straight down.

Going down in the elevator with Charlie, I said, "You're out of paper towels in the washroom. Gimme some and I'll put 'em in for you."

He made a derisive noise. "I can't remember the last time the landlord got us any paper towels. This is a cheap building, man. Half the time the tenants put in their own rolls if they wants toilet paper."

The next morning I brought it all with me. I waited outside the building until somebody went in. Then I waited long enough for Charlie to start taking him up in the elevator. I looked in, the lobby was empty. I climbed the stairs to the washroom.

I had a little piece of wood I wedged under the door. That would give me all the warning time I needed if somebody wanted to come in. I knew I was being too careful, but I wiped my prints off the gun, the silencer, and the cartridge clip. Then I taped them inside on the back of the box, up toward the top. I pulled on them a little, they held fine.

I taped the towel box door closed. It looked fine. Anybody could see through the slot at the bottom that it was empty, but even if some fool stuck his finger in to find a towel, he couldn't touch my things.

I unwedged the washroom

door, walked down two flights, and rang for the elevator. When I heard the motor start and saw the elevator cables moving, I slipped down the stairs. I was out of there like I'd never been in.

Only a mouse was left, and I took care of that after work, near my aunt's place. Some kids were there, about ten, twelve years old, playing stickball. I watched them for a while, enjoying it and figuring out who was the brightest. Then I walked over to him and gave him a five dollar bill. "This is for you," I said, "or you can split it with your friends. What's your name?"

"I'm Joey," he said. The game had stopped and the other kids were now around us. Joey was tough. "Well, what's your name?" he demanded.

"I'm Ernesto. My Aunt Prudencia lives there on the third floor." I pointed to it.

"What do you want for your money? Me to go into the alley with you?" he asked aggressively.

"Nothing like that. I want a mouse. A dead one. I want you to trap one for me. When you bring it to me, you get another five."

"Whatcha want it for?" Some of the other kids joined in, "Whaddya gonna do with it?" "Yeah, why?"

"None of your business," I said pleasantly.

"A rat is easier. All you want in those buildings around that empty lot." Joey gestured at the trash-filled lot.

"No, not a rat. A mouse, a little mouse."

Joey was quick. "A mouse is gonna be hard to get. I never see any. Probably the rats eat 'em up like tortilla chips. Make it another ten, man."

"Just get some traps at the hardware store, smear a little peanut butter on for bait, put 'em out at night. Bring me one here, same time tomorrow, and you get the other five."

Joey shrugged his shoulders for the other kids, indicating he could do nothing more with such a nut. They whooped off, but I called after him, "Bring it to me in a bag, not carrying it by the tail."

The next day they were waiting for me. Joey opened a small brown bag. "There he is," he said. "Old man Schmidt let us put some traps in his deli overnight. Ain't he a nice one?"

"Top quality," I agreed. I handed him the other five dollars.

"We caught two," said Joey. He pulled another mouse from his pants pocket. "As long as I got him anyhow, I'll let you have him for two fifty. Sharing with my friends, I don't have

much left for myself."

I gave him another five. "Just don't grow up to be a thief, Joey," I said. "Being smart can work against you, too."

"Could you use a lizard?" one of the youngest asked. "My mother don't want me to keep it no more."

"I'm all done with the pet business," I said firmly. "Don't bring me no dead cats, dogs, goldfish. It's over."

I wrapped the mouse in foil and stuck it in my aunt's refrigerator, under the potatoes she keeps in the vegetable bin. It was in my pocket when I went to work the next day. But that day I didn't get to take any order to my boys, the other kid did. The mouse went back to my aunt's refrigerator overnight. Through the foil, I couldn't smell it at all.

I drew their order the next day. It was a pizza, packed in the regular cardboard box, and a double order of spaghetti with meatballs. That was in one of those round, flat aluminum containers with a cardboard top crimped down all around. And I was carrying the usual six-pack of beer for them.

I made the john on their floor the first stop. I opened the towel box, took out the automatic, and screwed on the silencer. I checked the chamber. A bullet was in there. I popped the car-

tridge clip in. I took all the silencer out of my right apron pocket and added it to the bills in the left pocket.

I put the gun in the right pocket. It stuck out a little but I had a rag from the kitchen ready and covered it fine. I was ready to deliver.

As usual, they were at their cards. I put the pizza, the spaghetti, and the beer on the table. Then I went around the card table to the radio on the window ledge. "Can I make it a little louder?" I asked, turning it up a little.

The one facing me answered. "You got good taste, Paco. That's the one and only Caruso doing Pagliacci." The other two had their backs to me. I wasn't more than three feet from them.

I took the gun out of my apron pocket. I made sure I had a good grip, the way the ex-cop at the pistol range in the Bronx had taught me. The first one I took out was the guy facing me. Then I took out the other two. There was no way I could miss, the gun was practically touching those two between their shoulders when I let go.

Only the last one got as far as twisting around in his chair and starting to get up. He went over sideways onto the floor. The one next to him had already pitched over onto the table. But the one facing me, the



one I took first, was still sitting in his chair. His face was hanging a little sideways, but he was still alive and looking at me. He wasn't making a sound, just looking. I wasn't going to worry about the chance of his surviving if he made it to the hospital emergency room.

So I just walked around in back of him and put two into the back of his head. I could have said something cute like, "This is for Julio," or "It's you or me, so I prefer it's you," but I thought that would be gross.

I wasn't going to check the other guys' pulses, either, to make sure they were dead. I gave each of them two in the head. Then I checked the clip. I had three bullets left. The automatic was a good weapon and I had done good, too.

I turned the volume down on the radio to where it had been when I came in. With my apron, I wiped off the knob but I knew the way it was ridged all around, there couldn't be any fingerprints on it.

I picked up the container with the spaghetti and meatballs and took it to the john. I wedged the door again. Then I uncrimped the top carefully and started eating spaghetti from the bottom. When I had made enough room, I worked the gun and the silencer into the bottom. I distributed the rest of the spaghetti over them and rear-

ranged the meatballs on top, the way it looked before.

Then I got my mouse out and tucked him in on top, his head sticking out one end and his tail the other end. The middle of him was covered with spaghetti.

I washed my face and hands all clear of that sauce and dried myself with my apron. I crimped the top cover back in place. I even remembered to take all of the silver out of my left pocket and put it back into my right pocket. Finally I took the container back to their office and put it on the table with the pizza and beer.

I rang for the elevator. Charlie wasn't as upset as I expected. "Somebody musta had it in for 'em," he said. "We better call the cops."

He started for the phone on their desk but I stopped him. "There might be fingerprints," I warned him. "Use some other phone. I'll keep watch here so nobody monkeys with anything."

Charlie brought up the cops from the first police car to arrive. They got there in about five minutes. One of them said to his partner, "A mob job, I guess. I'd better go down and radio this in." He left immediately.

I told the other cop, "We didn't touch the phone or anything else. And I stayed here

the whole time, except for long enough to ring for the elevator. Nobody touched anything."

"That's fine," said the cop sourly. He patted Charlie and me for weapons, then he made me roll up my sleeves to look for needlemarks. But I could see he wasn't taking us seriously, it was just he couldn't stand around doing nothing until the detectives got there. In his little notebook, he wrote down our names, addresses, who we worked for, their phone numbers, and everything else he could think of.

The other cop came back and he just looked around. Then the real fun started. Another pair of cops arrived and they left to check the building floor by floor. Then two detectives arrived, then about four more. A couple of paramedics came in and checked the bodies with a stethoscope to make it official, I guess. They left right away.

A couple of detectives searched the bodies. Another detective drew chalkline circles around the spent shells on the floor and counted them. He announced, "From the shells, they were standing behind these guys, watching 'em play cards. Good friends, all from the same mob, huh? When they let go, these suckers never knew what hit 'em."

One of the detectives who had been searching the bodies said

for everybody to hear, "If any of you guys thought otherwise, robbery was not the motive. They each got plenty of cash on 'em. That one—" he pointed "—has got a ring on his finger with a rock that must be worth two, three grand."

Another detective searched Charlie and me. We had to turn out our pockets and he made us go through the roll-up-your-sleeves routine, looking for needlemarks.

Charlie was the one who had it rough. They wanted to know who he took up in the elevator during the past hour or so, who they were, what floor they got off on, did he notice any strangers hanging around. Then they asked him if he left at any time to go to the john, could he have dozed off in his chair? By this time, he was getting confused, and he was agreeing to everything they suggested.

From me, all they wanted to know was how much time it took from when one of the dead guys phoned in their order until I got there with it. I told him I guessed not more than ten minutes, but one of the detectives left to check it with my boss.

When he got back, he reported, "At least fifteen minutes, probably twenty." He turned to me and said, "You're a lucky bastard. If you'd been here any sooner, you'd have walked in on 'em. That would

have left four on the floor, not three."

All the time I was watching that food on the table. Finally it happened. One of the detectives opened the pizza box and helped himself to a slice. Then he popped open a beer. "Hey, man," I hollered, "you eat that, you got to pay for it."

"Relax, kid," he said. "We're good for it." A couple more detectives drifted over and helped themselves to the pizza.

Then one of them started to open the spaghetti container. "What we got here?" he asked me. I gave him a plate and a plastic fork to hold while I took over opening the container for him. "Today's special," I said. "Meatballs with spaghetti. We make it real good." I held out the open container so he could fill his plate.

Instead he cursed. He waved to the other detectives and me to look. "Do you believe this? I swear, they cooked a mouse right in with the meatballs. Get it the hell outta my sight. It's enough to make me puke."

I worked the cover back on and hung on to the container. "I gotta take it back and show it to the boss," I explained, "or else he'll think I'm holding out the money I collected for it. None of my customers ever found a mouse in the food before. Once in a while a couple

of cockroaches, sure, but not a mouse."

By then, one of the top brass arrived along with an assistant D.A. Everybody called the guy with the gold braid "chief," but I found out from TV later he was only a deputy chief.

He didn't fool around with his men. "Let's cut out all this standing around crap," he boomed. "This is probably a payback for the execution of that capo outside that restaurant two weeks ago. Let's have the technicians and the medical examiner up here. You guys get out on the street. Your informers can give you more in a minute than you're going to find out hanging around here all day. Something big is going up. A gang war's started."

The assistant D.A. looked at Charlie and me. "Who are these guys?" One of the detectives explained. "If you don't need 'em any more, get 'em out of here," he ordered.

A uniformed cop started to shove me out the door but I said, "I'm not going until I collect for the pizza and the beer. I ain't paying for it outta my pocket." He quit pushing me and went around with his hand out. He collected six or seven singles and stuck them in my hand. "Go," he said.

I went out into the hallway and I could take only a couple

of steps. The lights were blinding and there was a mob of reporters and TV people jammed around. When they saw me, they dropped Charlie and surrounded me. With those light-bars shining on my face, all I could see was the half dozen microphones stuck in front of me. Everybody was asking questions at the same time. I didn't know who to try to listen to first.

I picked a woman reporter in a pretty dress and just paid attention to her. From watching TV news, I knew how to handle it. Their questions tell you what they want you to say, just you've got to say it back a little stronger. Were you surprised to discover a triple murder? Sure, I was shocked. You were the first one on the scene? Yes, then I called Charlie—that's the elevator man, a nice guy—and he phoned the cops. You had no reason to expect them to be murdered? Oh, no, they were just like everybody else. Nothing special about them. Don't you think they knew their killers? Yeah, they must have known them—they let 'em get up real close. How'd they treat you, were they big tippers? Well, I wouldn't say that. Same as anybody else, I guess.

After a while, I got tired of it. "I got to get back to work or I'll get fired," I said and pushed my

way out. Then I headed back, but instead of going in, I went around to behind the kitchen. There was a big Dumpster there, one of those giant steel bins with a heavy cover where we put all the garbage. Once a week a special truck comes by and takes away the bin and dumps the whole mess somewhere.

With a stick, I worked the container of spaghetti with my five hundred dollars' worth of equipment down into the Dumpster as deep as I could get. Nobody was going to find it by accident.

Then I went around the front to the boss. "The cops ate the pizza and had the beer," I told him. "Here's what I collected from them. They didn't touch the spaghetti. There was a mouse in it. You want it back, it's in the first trash can I passed. You'd better watch out tomorrow, the cops said they'd have the Health Department inspectors here."

That worried him but he still wanted to know all the details about what happened. But I took off my apron and said, "Pay me off. I'm lucky I didn't get killed. If I'd walked in on them, the red stuff on this apron wouldn't be just tomato-and-garlic sauce."

He paid me off and I went back to our apartment. It was

the first time I'd been back since this thing started. It was strange. Nothing was changed, but it was all different. I felt like I was intruding in somebody else's apartment.

It got a little better after I phoned my folks and my aunt to tell them I was okay but to watch the TV news. Then I waited for the five o'clock news. It was the first item and they covered it big. Same on the six o'clock. On the ten and eleven o'clock programs, it was all repeated plus some talk about a gang war starting and interviews with officials, even the mayor.

I was fine. I sounded like a real dimwit, the same as any citizen being interviewed about his quiet next door neighbor who'd just finished chopping up his wife and three kids with an axe.

I've read this over a few times and I think I got it straight in my head, what I've got to do now. What helped was my remembering about Hamlet, when

we studied it in school. He was a coward, like me. He even admitted it. For revenge, he never really did anything—it was only when the king tried to get him that finally he took out the king and became a hero.

I know where he made his big mistake, too. It was in dropping Ophelia instead of marrying her. She'd have supported him against her old man, and she'd have lobbied everybody into the idea of the king retiring in favor of Hamlet.

So I'm going to go back to work for Mr. Riley as a messenger, but I'll go to college at night. There I'll look for some nice girl with maybe a dumb job like mine but with just one wish, like mine, to avoid the mess most people make out of their lives.

I'd like to save what I've written here, for the kids we'll have, for them to read and cry over. But I can't hide it for that long, so this is going into the fire now.

Right now.

# Last Straws

by Jeffrey Bush



**I**t was Jenny's favorite time of day, the cocktail hour. Not that they drank cocktails any more—their latest substitute was some sort of wine that wasn't wine, something quite nice, really, with no alcohol in it, like fizzy grape juice. And none of them was feeling festive, after the dreadful thing that had happened. But here they were, under the apple trees, on Heather's stone terrace, in Heather's uncomfortable wooden chairs, in front of the sweet little deconsecrated church she had turned into a summer house, hoping to see a deer, for one magical moment, at the end of her field.

*Please come,* Jenny told the deer, sitting perfectly still, so she wouldn't make the slightest movement to alarm it. Which was ridiculous, because when it came—if it came—it would be hundreds of yards away, outlined against the sky in the gap in Heather's

stone wall. Much too far away for any movement from the terrace to frighten it.

But it was so important that it come, so terribly important, that one must do whatever one could, no matter how senseless. And then she knew that it was not going to come at all.

"Oh dear," she said, breaking the spell. If there had been one.

"No deer," Don added wryly, so that she wondered if she'd been silly again, though she hadn't said anything about the deer, not aloud. But after twelve years of marriage she had accepted the fact that she had no sense of humor.

"If only we'd see one—"

"Then everything would be all right?" This time he was openly ironic.

"You know what I mean."

Other summers, they had seen a deer almost every afternoon, or two deer, or even three, on their way to the road and the woods at the other side. Where were they now, when she needed them most?

"I know exactly what you mean," Heather said, in her clear, loud, comforting way. "If only one of those wretched animals would show itself, then we'd know *something* was all right."

No one intimidated Heather, not even Don. Heather was so solid, solid and reassuring; it was entirely proper that she was a sculptor, not a sculptress. And Jenny, gratefully, could leave the discussion to the two of them, the talkers, while she kept her eyes on the gap in the distant stone wall. For she knew what they were going to talk about; they had been talking about it for four days; she could not bear to hear them talking about it any more; and there was just a chance, now that neither of them was paying attention, that a deer would come, after all.

"I hardly think—" Don was saying, in his most associate-professorish voice, when she picked up the conversation again. And though he was not allowed to finish, it was plain what he hardly thought. He hardly thought that the murder of a dear friend, two miles up the road, in his vegetable garden, was very mysterious. Shocking, yes. But not inexplicable. Though poor Gus had been found between the lettuce and the tomatoes, badly beaten, without a single clue to show who had done it, or for what reason.

"Gus?" Heather cried, for what must have been the twentieth time. "Good, kind, gentle Gus? Who never hurt anyone?"

It was true. Of all their neighbors, Gus had been the quietest, the most sensitive, the most considerate. Though he had had the



build of a construction worker, and the beard of a sea captain, he had never been known to raise a hand in anger. It was his poetry that was so ferocious.

"They must have seen him from the road."

The awful thing—the disgraceful thing—was that there was no need to ask who Don meant by "they." After the first breathless phone calls, the first interrogations by the state police, when the three of them had assembled, late that day, for their first agitated conference in Heather's kitchen—once the vestry—they had discovered, to their shame, that the same thought was in all their minds.

A local person. Or persons.

"But *why*?"

"They were driving by—"

But did they drive by? Wasn't it remarkable, instead, how seldom a local person drove by?

"And saw him working in his garden—and couldn't stand it."

Had been unable, that is, to endure the sight of someone so privileged, so affluent, so idle—for they could have no notion of the poetic demons that Gus wrestled with—that all he had to occupy himself with were the organically grown vegetables behind the converted barn he lived in. Whereupon they had leapt out of their vehicle, consumed by murderous rage, and attacked him. With some hard, sharp weapon. Or weapons.

But was such an act imaginable?

A rock thrown through one of his windows, perhaps. A firecracker exploded in his mailbox. That kind of vandalism a carful of local youths might be capable of, after too much to drink. But this?

"Just because he was there?" Heather demanded. "A *summer person*?"

"It could have been any one of us."

"I don't believe it."

"You don't believe it," Don retorted, "because you don't want to." None of them wanted to believe it. It was too painful to believe.

"There's no proof," Heather said.

"There's no proof of anything." He rounded on Jenny. "Thanks to your blessed creatures."

To which she had no reply. For evidently, at some point during that bloody morning, it *was* her deer that had taken advantage of the open gate, invaded the garden, and obliterated whatever traces there might have been in the earth of a human being. Or human beings.

She gripped her glass.

"At the store," Heather said, "they're as friendly as ever."

"Of course," Don said.

"Friendlier."

"Why not?"

"They stop to say how sorry they are."

"No doubt they are."

"We'd have noticed something, wouldn't we? Before this? There would have been *some* kind of sign?"

"There was."

Heather grimaced.

He meant the Bruners' dog.

Ten days ago, three miles down the road in the opposite direction, the Bruners, searching for that small, irritable animal, had come upon its battered body in a ditch. At the time, there had been widespread relief. Its fits of hysterical barking at unidentified trespassers had filled the night air for miles around.

But now—

First the Bruners' dog? Then—?

Jenny shut her eyes.

"Somebody out there," Heather said, "hates us?"

"Or somebodies."

There was no way to shut out what Don and Heather were saying. Opening her eyes, Jenny looked at the long, pale sweep of Heather's field, at the green, rolling hills beyond. They had the special light, the special stillness, that came just before sunset.

"It's so *unreasonable*," Heather said.

"We're not talking logic here."

But he was. That was exactly what he was talking. What both of them were talking.

"We haven't *done* anything," Heather said indignantly. "We're not—" She broke off.

"*Vulgar* summer people?"

"We're *not*."

"No. We're not. We're *nice* summer people. Which makes it worse, doesn't it?" He grinned sardonically. "Artists—academics—" He was leaving out Jenny, naturally. Jenny was nothing in particular. "Restoring old farmhouses. Putting up new ones. Doing our best not to offend anyone."

Gus's vegetable garden, Jenny remembered suddenly, was behind his converted barn.

No one could have seen him from the road.

That was significant, wasn't it?

"Why *now*?" Heather said. "When we've all been here for ages?"

"More or less."

"The last people who built a new place along this road are the Maxwells. And that was two years ago."

"Three."

"What's changed, in the last three years?"

Don leaned forward.

"Last month, it was blacktopped."

At least the machinery was gone, with its grunting and spluttering, day after day, that had almost driven them crazy. And the smell of tar, everywhere, every night.

"So?"

"If you'd lived here all your life, how would you feel about that?"

"Mr. Gillette likes it."

Don waved away Mr. Gillette. Mr. Gillette, the furniture restorer, with his pony tail and his granny glasses, was no better than a summer person.

"If you thought that more and more of your territory had been taken away from you—if you believed you'd been pushed into a corner, by an alien species—that might be the last straw."

Jenny knew about last straws.

There were moments, in the city, when she wondered what she would do if the chatter at the dinner table grew any more animated, if the candles burned any brighter, if an occasion she could already scarcely tolerate became, in any way, any more so.

And that was the sensation she was beginning to experience now. It was difficult to swallow, and if she raised her glass, her hand would tremble.

Somehow, Don and Heather had it all wrong.

"Nonsense," Heather said.

But she was giving in. Each time they'd had this argument, she'd given in.

"You'd strike back. Like an animal." He turned. "Like a deer."

It must have been the last straw.

"But deer aren't—"

Aren't animals, Jenny had been about to say. At which she would have been laughed down.

But they weren't. They were—spirits. Spirits of the land.

"It wasn't a local person," she said, instead. To her own astonishment.

He raised his eyebrows.

"Then who, may I ask, was it?"

All she could do was shake her head.

But it hadn't been a local person. She knew it hadn't.

"So it was no one?" He chuckled. "Is that it?"

She was on her feet, forcing him to get to his, breaking up the party, something she never did, accepting some of Heather's summer squash, preparing to walk back along the road, a quarter of a mile, to their remodelled schoolhouse.

"Are you going to be okay?" Don asked Heather.

"I'll padlock the door," she said ruefully.

And they were on their way, the squash in a paper bag that Don was swinging at his side, rather casually, as if he might not be upset if it burst. He was not a fan of summer squash.

They arrived at the road in silence. They never had anything to say to each other after parties.

"That was interesting," she made herself say, "what you said about last straws."

And thought, *That's what today may have been. For you and me.*

But this was a realization that was going to have to be looked at later. For there, without warning, were the deer.

Where had they come from? They must have made a noise, but she had heard nothing. At first, there seemed to be a troop of them. But perhaps there were only three or four, standing motionless, at Heather's side of the road, staring at her.

She stared back. She had never been so close to those angular faces, that soft breath, those huge, dark eyes. They were almost human, she saw, or fancied she saw, in the dusk. And not human at all.

Was it possible that they had not been aware of her approach, either? That this meeting was, as it were, unscheduled? That it was continuing for so long because they had not made up their minds what to do?

"Aren't they lovely!" she whispered.

And then they were moving, toward the woods at the other side of the road, more than she had thought, even at her first sight of them—ten?—eleven?—clattering across the new macadam on their hard, sharp hoofs.

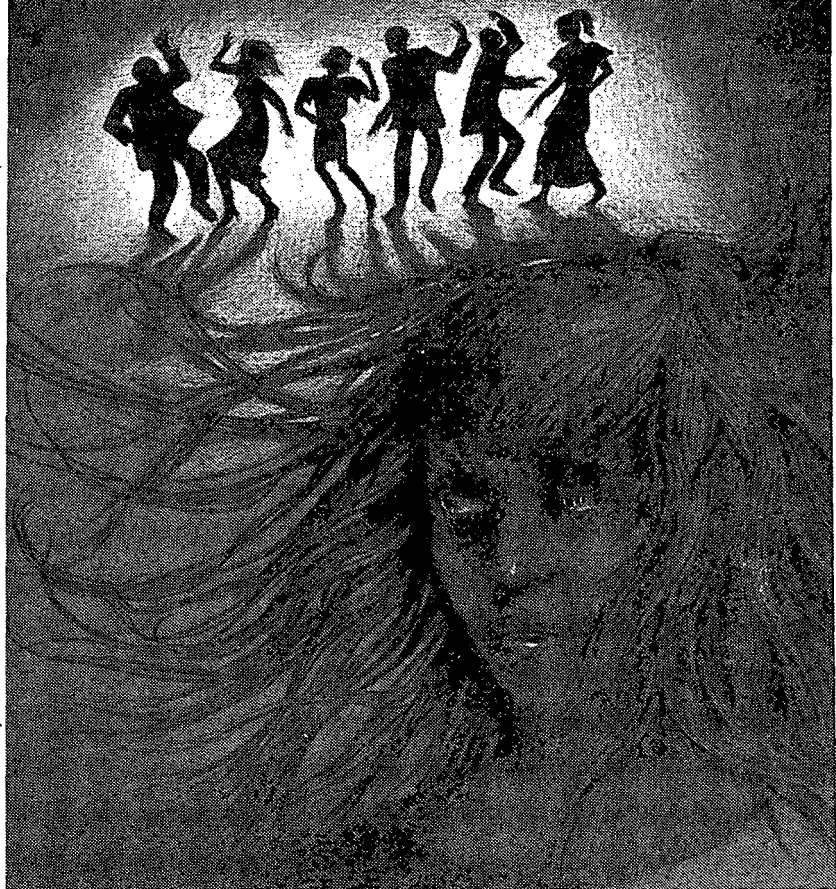
"Jesus," Don said, beside her.

But he didn't understand. There was no danger. The deer, for now, had spared them.

FICTION

# Out of Touch

by Lyn Peters



*Illustration by Judy Mitchell*

131

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was just a slice of moon suspended in a cloudless indigo sky that Friday night, and enough of a chill in the air to remind me that winter, and its endless boredom, would soon be settling in. It was a night made to be taken advantage of, a night for making memories to be tucked carefully away inside my mental scrapbook, to be relived later when the plummeting temperatures of winter's icy grasp would make staying indoors a matter of necessity, rather than one of choice. Time was I wouldn't have thought much of having the freedom to enjoy such a night. I would have stepped out into that crisp, clean air and gone off with the gang, unappreciative of being allowed to do so. That was before Dad's accident on Cloverhill Curve, before Mom's grief over his death made a virtual prisoner of me. She believed, actually *believed* if she'd kept him from leaving home that night, he would not have died. Mom was wrong, of course, everyone, from the Widow Hanley down the street to Aunt Mildred in Toronto, tried talking some sense into her, but nothing anyone said could convince her. Mom was determined to see to it that no freak accident would come to claim me, too, and beyond attending school, I was forbidden to leave the house without her.

In the beginning, I tried to be patient and understanding with her fears. As time passed and I began to grow more restless in my confinement, I tried reasoning with her, but it did no good. Mom grew defensive about her decision, she acted as if I *wanted* something to happen to me. When reason failed to break through the shroud of anxiety she'd so tightly wrapped around us, I tried arguing, pleading, and once, only once, I openly defied her and went out with the gang for a soda, after which I lost my telephone privileges indefinitely, and life grew even more dismal.

In fairness to Mom, I do know she meant well, I know she was devastated by Dad's death, and meant only to protect me. She did not realize, though, that she was suffocating me, and destroying the loving relationship we'd once shared. She did not understand that what she'd sentenced me to was so much worse than if I'd been with Dad when that semi hit our old pickup. I had no choice but to resign myself to remaining confined within the new boundaries Mom's irrational fears set for me. I lost my friends, and much of my interest in life. There was no laughter in our home, we stopped talking, stopped caring. Anger and resentment took up permanent residence within me.

Nearly ten months had passed since Dad's death when I men-



tioned the dance at the high school down in Trenton. I did so purely out of reflex, caught up in the excitement of being back in school, remembering a time when Mom would have shared my excitement, and would have encouraged me to go. I heard myself telling her, and stiffened, waiting to hear her sigh softly, to see her arrange her once soft, youthful features deeper into sorrow's mask. I'd expected a quick, gentle pat on the arm, a small, almost imperceptible shrug of her shoulder, and silence. I expected those things, but they did not come. That morning, that beautiful, sunny Monday morning, my world shifted unexpectedly. Mom smiled, the first smile I'd seen in so very, very long, and said perhaps I would be able to go to the dance.

I sat in stunned silence, marveling at the excitement and anticipation that those words generated within me. I'd received my pardon.

Giddy with happiness, I rushed off to school and told the gang I would be joining them on Friday, and predicted that in no time at all, things would once again be back to normal. Sue Anne squealed with delight and hugged me, Jeannie offered to take me shopping for a new dress, Henry and Phil said they were glad I'd be coming along, said they'd missed me. Bobby, sweet, sweet Bobby, on whom I'd had a crush since I was six or seven, promised me a corsage, and every slow dance. I could not have been happier, and my happiness made me acknowledge just how lonely and out of touch I had been all those long months.

I spent the week engrossed in preparations for Friday. I searched my closet over and over again for just the right dress to wear. I fussed and fiddled with my hair, determined to push and pull my limp, lifeless mop into stunning perfection. I was interested in life again, and it felt wonderful.

Friday came at last. Mom and I still had not discussed the dance, the details of curfew, who would be driving, what time I would be leaving, nothing. A tiny voice in the back of my mind tried to be heard, tried to tell me I should sit down and straighten those things out . . . just to be certain. A louder, stronger voice, the one I wanted to hear, told me not to worry, that she'd said I could go and to question her decision would be unwise. Naturally I listened to that louder voice, it was the one that pleased me.

Bobby was supposed to pick me up at seven thirty, but I was dressed and ready long before that. I paced and fidgeted in my room until I could no longer avoid going downstairs.



I found Mom in the living room, watching TV. She glanced up at me and, without a word, returned her attention to the screen. I waited for her to acknowledge me, to actually *see* me. Five minutes ticked agonizingly by before I managed to choke out a pitiful, "Well?"

Mom dragged her eyes from the television and looked at me blankly.

"Do you like it?" I did a clumsy twirl, and when I faced her again, I saw that look, felt her hand pat my arm, and I turned without a word to go back to my room.

I have no idea whether minutes or hours passed between the moment I flung myself down on my narrow bed and my first awareness of soft lilting music, dimmed lights, laughter, happiness. Sensations surrounded me, washed over me, coursed through me, intensified beyond belief. I could not speak to them, I could not reach out and touch them, but my other senses made up for those losses. I could hear each note of the music as I had never heard music before, I listened to jokes and gossip, heard girls giggling and boys boasting. I saw everything, it seemed, at once. The intricate, detailed pattern embroidered into Sue Anne's new dress, the tiny, telltale spot of lipstick on Phil's cheek, where Jeannie had kissed him, the ever so slightly wilted petals of corsages. Perfumes and aftershaves mingled, not altogether unpleasantly, with the slightest hint of perspiration from the dancers. I drank in every detail eagerly, filled myself with the sights and sounds of the living, and found no disappointment in my inability to be seen or heard. To have expected it, or even wished for it, would have been absurd, I knew that, just as I knew well what had happened was not, as most would think, a dream. I was, in fact, with them . . . in spirit. I might not have known, might have believed the experience to be a dream, had I not, once before, unexpectedly taken such a trip out of my body. That first trip had been nearly a decade before, and had terrified me so, I'd sworn I would never let "it" happen to me again. The circumstances surrounding my first and second experiences were so vastly different, though; I was as delighted on the second trip as I had been terrified on the first.

I stayed until the dance ended, and the lights came on, and the room began to empty. I heard my friends discussing what they planned on doing next, and instead of returning to my place, as I should have, I went with them.

I could almost taste the foot-longs and fries they ordered and

gobbled down at Dinky's Dog House, and enjoyed more than I could ever have imagined cruising the streets of Trenton, listening to Bobby's tinny radio. I wanted the night to go on forever, I wanted to go on listening to them; watching them, they were so . . . *alive!* When Bobby turned the car around and headed for home, I could hardly bear the loneliness and despair that swept over me. They would be going home, to normality, and I would be returning to my emptiness.

The night was clear, the streets dry, there was no reason for Bobby to lose control of the car on Cloverhill Curve, but he did. The old wagon crashed easily through the guard rails and hung suspended in the air for a moment. I listened to Sue Anne's high, piercing wail of terror, and Bobby's soft, trembling curse, the first I'd ever heard him utter. I watched their bodies stiffen, saw the helpless horror on their faces, smelled their fear, and knew their pain. The car went down, smashing against boulders, hurling bits and pieces of metal and glass into the darkness. Their bodies were tossed, torn, broken, and at the bottom of Cloverhill Cliff, we were reunited.

When Dad returned to our spot, and saw what I had done, he was outraged. He said it was one thing for me to go on play-acting, pretending to be living still, imagining that I had not been with him when the truck pushed us over Cloverhill Cliff. He said dying so young, allowances could be made, but pulling Bobby's car over the cliff could not be excused and would have to be dealt with.

I go to trial next week and I don't know what they do in this world, when a crime such as mine has been committed. I can't help wondering what can be worse than death.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# The Ultimate Frog

by Roy Dickinson



Illustration by Karen Stolper

136  
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The stars were out. A moonlit cedar grove moved in the light breeze. There was a whippoorwill in the meadow below the camp. Four men who should have been asleep hours ago, choked between city walls, sat instead around a wood fire near a waterfall in the Ramapo Hills and talked. It seemed to one of the men as though he could hear Nature taking long, deep breaths. He felt close to truth there among the ferns. The talk had turned as it sometimes does to religion, and Nicoll, like all men who feel the truth and then try to explain the infinite in copybook catchwords—the only tools we have—was a little incoherent.

After Conan Doyle had been put in his place by one of the hard-faced ones from downtown, and a jobber in radio supplies had told why he didn't go to church, Nicoll said, "Whatever it is, it's here around us. Truth is inside each of us. I can't prove it by logic but I know. God is inside all of us. He is power, just waiting to be drawn out. There's only one mind in the universe. It's in you and it's in that waterfall and that grove in the hill. It's all the same thing. It's here now. We all go back to it some day. Sometimes I think Buddha Gautama had the right idea."

"When did *you* get religion, Nicoll?" asked Thompson, the broker.

"There's a striving in us all," said Nicoll, ignoring the interruption, "and we like to kid about it. It's a hunger that we run away from to jigsaw puzzles and bridge and the follies—to orange juice and gin. Our little parades to church each Sunday are like the glycerine tears of a movie star. We want something real; we want to know where the blue begins, like poor little Gissing when he ran toward the dawn all hot and discouraged. We feel if we could only reach the far horizon we'd find what our souls hunger for. Yet it's a fact that every man who searches for the ultimate is always a tragic figure. Sir Galahad searched far for the Holy Grail. The Maid of Orleans heard the voice of St. Catharine in an apple tree. It sent her on a long quest. Swedenborg talked to certain people on Christmas Eve in 1745, and a shoemaker of Goerlitz called Jacob Boehme looked into the soul of a pewter dish on a summer day in 1600. Men in all ages have groped toward the ultimate. They are driven by a hunger. You'll find this hunger all over the world now. If you'll read Ouspensky you'll find it there. It's in St. Paul, if you have a Bible.

"There's a hunger and a puzzled yearning in all of us that we can't satisfy. All over the world different people are groping in different ways and a blind desire is shaking the veins of the world

like swamp fever. We're all surrounded by subdued voices and little whispers which tell us to do something, and we don't know what they are or what the something is, but it's all the same thing. The outcome is always the same when we listen to the little voices—the voices Mahomet heard and Swedenborg and Copernicus and Old Man Sanders, only Old Man Sanders lowered his range from the stars to the housetops. He tried to organize a frog quartet. Listen."

From away down the valley came that sound which Nicoll had long been hearing. It had reminded him of an old gray man and his striving for an ideal. It was the throbbing, resonant, deep-pitched cry of one who looked up from the mud toward the distant stars.

"You mean that noisy old bullfrog down in the swamp?" asked Thompson.

"I mean that voice of silence crying aloud in the night," said Nicoll. "Let me tell you about Old Man Sanders." And save for occasional interruptions which had to do with Camels and pipe tobacco, the rest of the story is his.

I met Old Man Sanders one night out coon hunting. He was sitting on a log up back of my cabin on Malvern Brook. I'd heard of him often and how he lived with his daughter on the very top of Hogback Mountain in an old stone house, Dutch Colonial. Everybody wondered how they ever built it way up there.

I spoke to the old man and sat down there on the log with him. The dogs went off through the woods. It was about two in the morning—the time everything stirs in the woods and a rooster wakes up long enough to crow once and then goes back to sleep. Sanders was a fine old fellow, friendly and normal, and he knew the woods. We talked about them a minute, then I asked him how his daughter was. I'd seen him go by my house that morning at breakfast time, driving the old flivver like mad, and Doc Grimes later in the morning at the post office told me she didn't have a chance. They took her to the hospital over at the county seat and operated in a last-minute attempt to save her life. So I was almost afraid to ask him.

"She's going to come through all right," he told me. He said it with absolute certainty and I told him I was mighty glad to hear it. I asked him in a minute what time he'd phoned over that evening.

"I didn't phone," he said. "I heard it a few minutes ago on this



log and I'm sure. I sat here praying for hours and then suddenly I knew it was all right. God told me. He knows it. He knows all those things. He knows them in me. Just when I came to the end of my rope and stopped because I couldn't go any farther, He started in me, and it's all right."

Then he told me some more things along the lines I mentioned before, and I had an unusual experience. I knew he knew. I knew he had what I'd been groping for. I knew he'd had a moment of vision. Something had whispered to his spirit and I had felt a touch of its wings. It was weird but it was fine and I felt different somehow. We talked a little more, then he asked me to come up to see him sometime. I called the dogs then and went on. He told me before he left that he suddenly saw when he received his message, plain and clear, the whole plan of divine wisdom. He was a practical old cuss and I knew he had something.

I didn't get up to his cabin for two weeks. Then one day I walked up. He took me in and showed me his daughter still in bed, but almost ready to get up. Doc Grimes had told me she didn't have one chance in nine hundred when they took her away.

We walked out in the shadows back of the house and I tried to get him to tell me some more about his message. But I could see he had lost it. A little remained. But just like those sudden insights into the scheme of things you get sometimes under laughing gas, the great certainty he had was almost gone. Just as the truth fades out at the very moment of coming out of the anaesthetic, he told me he'd forgotten things that no one could remember and keep sane.

But he had kept two things. His absolute certainty that for an instant he had been one with God and all else in the world, and an intense desire to be of some service, to give something of his inner self. His close relation to God had started to fade out but he kept the knowledge that he should be the means of God's revealing something, of achieving something great and big, but he didn't know what it was or just how to go about it.

Like the Indian in his yoga I've read about, the old man had come face to face with facts no reason could ever know. He'd come out of his samadhi with his character changed, his life illumined, but he couldn't quite get back to where he'd been on the log when I first saw him. His experience checked up closely with several flashes I had had at intervals all through my own life, and I wanted to talk more about them. But he had come back to his practical

relationship with the world. He was afraid of the other. Afraid he'd go too far with it. So we talked of practical things like the radio. He had listened in the first time the night before down at Pete Lodge's house in the village. All the local stations had signed off, and then Pete, who had invited the old man in to show him the new toy, by some freak of chance picked up Chicago on a battery set.

Old Man Sanders was full of the wonder of it. They had picked up a male quartet out of the air. Probably four song-pluggers with patent-leather hair on the top of a Chicago office building. To him, though, those singers had some connection with the music of the spheres. "Right through the walls their voices came, all the way from Chicago," he said.

That is how he came to get the idea that he had to make music. This sickness of heart, this desire to act as a means of revelation for something he had to get back, ever since he caught a glimpse of it out there on the log, made him want to put his vague desire into music. It was sort of pitiful, his attempts to get harmony out of a saxophone he bought from an advertisement in a farm publication. I'd often hear him when I was out with the dogs at night. I would go over and find him sitting on the same old log. He was in the presence of unforgettable things, but he couldn't attain them. He couldn't get back to the vision.

He told me one night after I had come over, attracted by the inharmonious grunts and cries of the saxophone giving out haphazard sounds under clumsy, earnest fingers. "It's no use, Mr. Nicoll, I've been trying to find my way back, but I can't. There's another world right around me here and I can't get back in. Somebody has closed the door. But I could make it, I know, if I could get harmony out of this. I wander about and I try to play. But it's no use. Where have they gone—those things I saw, the friends that told me all I wanted to know?" So he gave the saxophone to Pete Lodge, who still plays it in the local band.

The speaker paused and remained for a time looking into the fire.

"Everybody has had *some* queer experience," said Thompson; "What happened to the old man then?"

Again an old bullfrog from the edge of the pond below uttered his deep-toned "Better Go Round" and repeated his song three



times. When the bullfrog finished the speaker continued.

Sometimes it's the chirp of a cricket in the wood of an old house, sometimes it's the sound of a pattering rain on the tree leaves, sometimes it's the song of a bullfrog that heralds to a man the consciousness of the nearness of God. Everybody has some one call. The sound of a steamboat whistle at night away off, the moan of a light wind in the cedars, the bay of a distant hound, the toll of a church bell, or the night cry of a hoot owl—there is a sound for all of us.

It was two or three months after he gave away the saxophone that I saw Old Man Sanders again out on his log. I often talked about politics and the weather to him at the post office. But this night the bullfrogs were looking up from the mud of the ponds and singing to the clear, far stars.

He hungered to talk, it seemed.

"It's warm here and dark tonight," he said, "and it's here I'll sit and think a while and talk if you'll let me and not think I'm entirely queer. When it's like this and no light except the blinkin' stars, I hear them sing. It's like the voices of multitudes that won't make harmony. There's one now sings low; there's one, ye hear him way off, sings higher like. It's the voice of the world. Each singer there in the swamp is calling out to another. Like people they are, all over the world wantin' and hungerin' for the same thing they all crave. They squat there in the muck land and they look up and outside and beyond somewhere just past the stars they see, and they call to it. If they could just sing together now it would make a harmony, wouldn't it, Mr. Nicoll? But there they are, each in his own little mud hole, makin' each his own sound. There's no harmony. Each one sings his little chord. They can't chime together to make God's real hymn."

"Sort of a frog quartet you'd like to start?" I asked him.

"That's it," he jumped right back at me, eager as a kid, "a quartet each singing his own part, the best he knows it. All together in harmony."

"That's a good tenor down therè by the lily pond," I said.

We sat there a few minutes more in silence. He seemed to be listening to the voices all around us that kept whispering in the grass. I felt that sense of loneliness we all get at times and saw an old owl go flapping lazily over the trees near us, a dim form that momentarily shut off the stars.

I started as I heard the old man say, "I'll do it. It's the thing I have to hear."

I looked at his face in the dim light. He looked like a man who had set his heart on a great ideal, not like a man who was going to train animals. If I were talking to a gathering of mystics instead of a bunch of practical business morons round a campfire, I'd tell you just what he did look like.

It was the expression of a man who has seen a thing he must do, though he die for it. It was, in a word, the look of a man who sees an ideal, who starts on the impossible quest, the far journey. We successful businessmen compromise with our ideals. That's why we are successful.

The man who can't compromise is doomed. He gets crucified. We know how well *we* do with far less than perfection. We'll never even try for the other. The people who do try we don't consider respectable or regular. We help crucify them. I thought these things again that night as I saw Old Man Sanders start down the slope after the first tenor for his frog quartet.

The troubadors of the meadow and pond sing the folk songs of the little people. Each is an individualist and makes vocal his longing for the places beyond this gray world. He who would blend the many voices of humanity or of nature has a mighty task.

Or as Nicoll put it, "Old Man Sanders had a hell of a time with those frogs." He caught the first tenor. A peeper this frog was. No one knows when a peeper sleeps. If you were little enough and could sneak up like a brownie, you'd see him sitting by a lily pad at the pond's shore with his throat puffed out, hitting a note as high as the highest C on a violin. This first tenor caused three nights of hard work for the old man and finally was caught and put in the little pond just back of the cabin. He was the start of the Great Frog Quartet. The next came harder yet. Away off the old man would hear him—some old green frog by a swampy stump singing to the stars his mellow madrigal, "Getta Jug o' Rum! Getta Jug o' Rum!"

"There's my second bass now," the old man would say with his ear cocked and that eager look in his eyes, and he'd start off over bog and fen and ditch and dyke in the direction of the far voice. It was on his search for the second bass he ran foul of Mortimer Pardee, the big lawyer. Pardee has a place up the valley. This frog with the mellow bass was in the duck pond near his house. I can imagine Old Man Sanders slipping up on the singer inch by inch

and Pardee watching him from the dark of his top window. When Sanders crawled under the fence the lawyer ordered him off the place. He told me later how the old man looked up at his window, crawled along on his stomach a yard or so, and then made a leap into the mud at the edge of the pond. Pardee ran down with a shotgun and, convinced a lunatic was trying to attack his home, fired a load of birdshot at a tall figure dripping mud and running down the hill. Old Man Sanders had secured the second bass for his quartet at the expense of a load of shot whistling by his ears and the belief of a neighbor that he had been visited by a lunatic.

There was a change going on in Old Man Sanders like that in any person's soul who tries for the ultimate, who won't compromise with his ideal. He said to me soon after the shooting episode: "I'm beginning to feel that maybe the vision that came to me there on the log is the true state, and that the dream is feeding the cattle and plowing the fields and the other motions we go through to get enough to eat and wear. Out there I think is the real world. It's the one here that's the dream. Heaven is here inside me. I can hear it sing sometimes."

He must have told something like that to Pete Lodge. I saw Pete one evening and he told me he was getting worried about the old man.

"Used to talk regular," said Pete, "but he's been gettin' wild lately. Allows he's sort of a Joan of Arc or something. He had a story in the magazine section of the *Journal* with him last night at the house. One of those picture stories about a young musician. Took gas because he couldn't compose some sort of a symphony he felt swelling or welling or fermenting up within him, the paper said. The old man told me he knew just how this fellow felt. You know about him getting his feet all wet chasin' frogs around the swamp. It ain't right. I spoke to the doctor about it. Cracked, that's what he is. Going to make a frog quartet to give harmony at night. Doggone it, why didn't he speak to me about it? I'd 'a' taught him to play the harmonica and make all the music he wanted. But he's got his mind set on this frog thing, and ye can't get his mind off it."

For his first bass Old Man Sanders needed a green frog. On a summer night he is the singer you hear hitting about an octave below middle C. During the time he searched for him he spent some time out on his old log. He was being hounded then. Pardee

and Pete Lodge and the others had compared notes and the neighbors had done the rest. The old man who had set his heart on an ideal was "cracked."

The ladies had talked it over at the Dorcas Society meeting and considered the horror of the daughter up there on Hog Back in the cabin with an insane father. Something had to be done about it. He wasn't fit to be at large or run the farm. The girl would be neglected.

I went up one night to the cabin. He was out. "Looking for a specimen," his daughter Kate told me. I asked her about it and when she found I was sympathetic she talked. Some ladies had called and she had shown them the door.

"If Dad wants to get some frogs, whose business is it?" she said. "City people come up here and gather mushrooms and butterflies. Dad has a right to collect, and he's a lot more serious than they are about it. He won't quit. They'd better stop bothering him. He's getting right put out about it."

We talked for some time. She seemed to be altered. She had watercolors up there and was working with them. She talked about "trying to be what she knew she had it in her to be." Unlike most of these mountain people, she seemed to have a purpose and a desire. I felt in my heart it had something to do with the old man and his search for the frogs. Two new people seemed to have moved into the cabin. The change was evident everywhere.

At about nine o'clock the old man came out from the woods into the clearing. We were sitting on the porch and his two frogs were croaking, one high, one low. Once in a while they'd sing at the same time. He was excited as he called me. He had a bag in his hand. He reached in and pulled out a big green frog. "I've hunted four nights for this one," he said, and dropped it with a plunk into the little pond. Then we went back on the porch and listened.

It sounded like real music. The philosophy of song and the woods was there. There was the mysticism of creation in the harmony. The deep note of the old bull, the higher one of the green frog, and the shrill tenor of the peeper blended in a melody like an old folk song. I began to think of the "Ode to a Grecian Urn." It was the true harmony of the almost, the perfection of the nearly perfect. There was melody in the music as of a world striving to be articulate at some point beyond the light of the morning star.

"Now if I just had that pickerel frog. If we only had a second tenor here we'd have a perfect quartet," the old man said. He wasn't satisfied with the almost. I was.

Just then four men stepped up to the porch from nowhere.

"Could we speak to you a minute, Cal?" said one.

He left us and they all walked off a few steps. Their voices, low at first, rose a little, and I recognized Pete Lodge and the constable, Jeff Myers.

"Ye had no right to trespass, Cal," I heard one say.

"Well, ye better come along down for a few days," were the next words. At the flash of a pair of handcuffs something in the old man broke. The things his daughter had told him—the birdshot, the ridicule, the queer looks of the loafers at Jackson's store—all seemed to converge in that moment on the pair of handcuffs and the man who was trying to put them on his wrists. He stepped back and reached into a farm wagon. Then, as Jeff Myers leaped after him, the old man brought a heavy wagon spoke down on his head as hard as he could hit. The man fell and rolled over on his face. The handcuffs clanged on the rock. Sanders ran across the clearing.

Somebody cried, "Stop or I'll shoot." A shot rang out. The daughter screamed. The old man ran on.

Then I helped carry the other man into the house. He was limp and his head was bleeding badly. The doctor came later and ordered him to the hospital. He stayed there nine weeks with a fractured skull, and just pulled through. Of course there was a real feud from then on. The old man and his daughter disappeared. I found out later that several complaints had been lodged and the constables had gone up that night with a doctor to bring the old man down to the village for observation. The flash of the handcuffs led to the blow with the wagon spoke, and it wasn't the old man's fault the constable didn't die.

You can't almost kill a constable with impunity even up here in the mountains, and the state police went out after the old man. He took a potshot at one of them from behind a crag and from then on he was a hunted outlaw. They surrounded him once but he slipped through the lines. No one knew the woods better and he managed always to keep out of their way.

It was several weeks later that I went in the car to look at some hounds in a mountain village about twelve miles north of here. I stayed all night with a trapper I knew in a cabin above the village. We were out late, talking over old times. Suddenly I heard them. The first tenor, the second bass, and the first bass. Somewhere from away off over the trees among the waterways the rhythm of their

harmony came to me clear as an organ peal.

Those frogs were inspiring. They surely were the same ones. I couldn't mistake that clear first tenor anywhere. We walked over in their direction, the trapper and I. The nearer we came the surer I was that there were the frogs of Old Man Sanders.

I asked Bill McKinney—that was the trapper's name—if he had heard about the trouble over our way.

"Did you hear how Old Man Sanders almost killed a constable a while back?" I asked him.

Bill gave me a queer smile and said nothing, so I knew he knew just where Old Man Sanders was hiding up there in the mountains and that it *was* his three frogs I'd heard. After we came in I went out again later and located the little pond about three miles away from Bill's cabin. I sat on a rock and listened to their harmony for some time, hoping I might meet the old man, but he didn't show up. Near dawn I came back again.

I said no more about the old man that day, but just before I left for home McKinney said to me, "Old Man Sanders is still lookin' all over the country around here for that last frog, but you needn't say nothin' to the troopers about it. That old man is crazy—like a fox. If they ever get him they'll be a damn sight smarter than any trooper I've met yet."

But they did find him after all. It happened this way: We were all down at Jackson's store one evening waiting for him to distribute the mail. It was just after dusk. You must have read about it. They put it on an inside page in the city papers. It was a sensation here. Just happened about six weeks ago. A quiet night, some talk in the store about politics and the new road. Then suddenly a shot from up the road. In a minute Jackson's boy ran in, white around the gills.

"They got Old Man Sanders," he said.

I was one of the first there. The old man was sitting on a gray stone with his back to a tree. He looked as if he'd just fallen asleep there. He had been able to get as far as the rock after the shot hit him. He was dead. The rotten thing was that the troopers had seen him and ordered him to stop. But it wasn't any stranger who shot him. It was his own neighbor, Pete Lodge, who fired his fox gun at him as he started to skip up the side of the hill above Malvern Brook. The coroner's jury pronounced the old man criminally insane and all that. Lodge was exonerated officially, but they called

him an assassin in the neighborhood till he finally got out. The old man looked peaceful there on the rock. I was for lynching the man who fired the shot. I stayed there while the rest went for the sheriff. There was a little white box lying a few feet from the rock. I was there alone with the dead man. The moon was dim. The brook sang. It was lonesome. Suddenly I felt that queer prickling of the scalp which comes even to brave men, one of which I am not, in the presence of something they can't explain. The little white box had started to move and there was no wind!

Then I heard a sound like the soft scuffle of a moth against the screen at night.

I picked up the box and put it in my pocket just before the rest of the people came back.

In my cabin I opened the box and looked into the unblinking eyes of the ultimate frog—the final member of the poor old man's quartet, the one which had cost him his life.

He was a true pickerel frog. When I put him out in the pond in a little cage I fixed up, he hit middle C as true as a good cellist.

There was a moment of silence and then from the darkness beyond the embers someone asked an obvious question.

"Of course I did," said Nicoll. "I went up there with the second tenor two nights after the funeral. There are always people like me who try to pick up and carry on for a man who won't be satisfied with anything short of perfection. But it always seems to work out the same way."

The other three frogs had disappeared.



# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



Illustration by Jim Gilsen

**J**onathan Valin's latest Harry Stoner novel, **Fire Lake** (Delacorte, \$14.95, 255 pp.), opens when Stoner gets a call from the manager of a sleazy motel: a man registered as Harry Stoner has just taken an overdose. Harry investigates and finds a long-estranged friend from his college days, an ingratiating guy named Lonnie Jack. "Fire Lake," it turns out, is Lonnie's dream of making it big—as a musician, a hustler, even as a drug dealer if it comes to that—the "big score" that will set him up for life. It's also his word for the big thrill he gets from the drugs he uses. This is a fast-paced detective story that explores some provocative themes: the meaning of "old friends," whatever happened to the sixties, the tragedy that can befall those who hang on to a pipe dream too long.

**Seascape with Dead Figures** by Roy Hart should please fans of the classic British mystery. The body of a wealthy old man is found at the bottom of a steep cliff the morning following one of his civilized dinner parties, and Detective Superintendent Roper knows that it was neither suicide nor accident. Further investigation reveals myriad good reasons and motives for murder; the question is, whodunit? The seaside New Year's holiday milieu is atmospheric, and the small village characters are fresh and yet credible. (St. Martin's \$13.95, 189 pp.)

**The Recycled Citizen** is another of Charlotte MacLeod's frothy

Sarah Kelling concoctions, and it's delicious. At the center of the tale are the decent Dolph and Mary Kelling, whose latest philanthropic project—a senior citizen's recycling center and future housing project—is threatened when one of the seniors is fatally mugged and an "illegal substance" spills out of his recycling-center shopping bag. As always, Sarah is eager to help her elders, but she's due to deliver her first baby at any moment. So her handsome spouse assumes the main burden of the investigation, naturally assisted by other eccentric members of the Kelling clan. Several red herrings, a huge charity auction held in the family manse's ballroom, and several other plot events—all neatly bound together with the glue of the inimitable Kelling clan—make this latest one of the best in the series. (Mysterious Press, \$15.95, 208 pp.)

Con man Milo Turner returns in Francis M. Nevins, Jr.'s **The Ninety Million Dollar Mouse**, a pip of a tale (Walker, \$16.95, 207 pp.). Milo's cover (one of many, I might add) is thoroughly penetrated when he is approached by a charismatic Scot with a proposal from a huge computer company. The plot premise is intriguing: the company's boy-wizard/president suddenly died of a heart attack in a plane in flight that was carrying the president, the pilot, and the company's attorney. The boy mogul allegedly made a holographic will just moments before death, leaving all his assets—which would include his firm's stock—to a worldwide "new" religion, one known for the fanatic loyalty of its followers. The corporate officers want Milo to verify the authenticity of the will—to tell you more here would be to spoil several of the book's many surprises. This is neatly plotted and prettily paced, with just the right dash of suspense for zest. Don't look here for gritty realism, but do expect to be amused and entertained. You won't then be disappointed.

I've already lavished so much praise on William Marshall's earlier books that I won't spend much space here repeating myself just because there's a new Yellowthread Street Mystery. I'll just say that **Frogmouth** (Mysterious Press, \$15.95, 192 pp.) gives you what you've come to expect from Marshall: the old gang, each functioning—or trying to—in his own inimitable way; one humorous subplot which appears to be irrelevant, but isn't; one subplot that resolves itself after much true hilarity; and a main plot—with our main man Feiffer investigating—that unravels in a horrid and chilling manner. You read Marshall and you careen madly down a greased path that swings from the profane to the inane. It's an exhilarating ride.

Ballantine has published a book notable for its place in the annals of popular French fiction, and it's fun for anyone interested in the period and the book's background. It is titled **Fantômas** (\$3.95, 327 pp.) after the archvillain of the piece, and it's authored by Marcell Allain and Pierre Souvestre. The novel is long and breathless, but the good Inspector Juve finally ties up all the loose ends dangling from the many subplots (although the ending certainly leaves Juve with egg on his face). What's most interesting about all this is the mad appeal this book—and its dozens of sequels—had on the French people. The *Fantômas* legend, which was translated into several films, comic books, and everything else imaginable, was not only resilient but especially enduring. Taken as a period piece (and the introduction by John Ashbery tells all), *Fantômas* gives a lot of evildoings for your money.

Insurance investigator Dave Brandstetter takes on a grim case when a stabbing victim is purposely placed in his front yard. The police believe the victim is another in a series of murders of men dying of AIDS, men thus being shown to **Early Graves** (Mysterious Press, \$15.95, 192 pp.). As always, Joseph Hansen gives us a quietly compelling novel with the sane and sage Dave at the heart of the case. If the plot seems a bit thin, the characters who people it and the writing are definitely full-bodied.

Thomas Millstead's **Behind You** (Dell, \$3.95, 282 pp.) is for fans of page-turning thrillers. The setting for this is the pretty and picturesque Wisconsin town where hero Whit Pierce returns after the inexplicable suicide of his wife. He hopes that the small town where the two met and married will provide him with some answers. What he finds instead is a series of rather grisly murders, and a net that seems to be closing in on him.

Just a note for those of you—and you *are* numerous, after all—who appreciate good short stories. **Prime Suspects** (Ivy Books, \$2.95, 229 pp.) edited by Bill Pronzini and Martin H. Greenberg, offers up thirteen well-known writers who have turned their hand to murder and mystery. The names of the contributors alone ensure a good read.

# DID YOU MISS ANY OF THESE CLASSIC ALFRED HITCHCOCK ANTHOLOGIES?

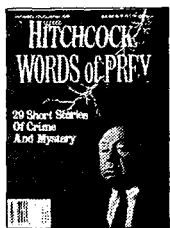


## A MYSTERY BY THE TALE

Twenty-eight great tales that will thrill, chill, divert, beguile, pique, enthrall, entertain, absorb, intrigue, galvanize, disquiet, startle, titillate, provoke, electrify, stimulate, excite, arrest, engage, deceive, seize, mystify and baffle you.

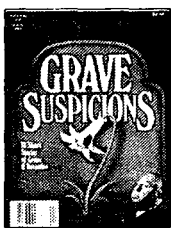
## WORDS OF PREY

They are hunters...or hunted! Often the hunters are the hunted. They exist in different times and places, from feudal Japan to our Midwest. The internal and external landscapes of their quests—vivid, subtle, disturbing or humorous—create a myriad of unforgettable experiences.



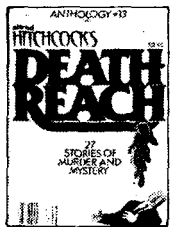
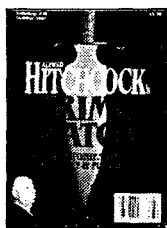
## GRAVE SUSPICIONS

Murder lurks in a grave plot... 28 intricately woven tales of suspense in this classic anthology. Unravel the secrets and discover the suspicions in 347 puzzling pages.



## CRIME WATCH

The best mystery stories center on clues, and in this anthology unusual clues abound. Each of the 25 stories centers on an intriguing key to an unusual situation. Keys such as a pig-pen, the morning paper and a pair of dancing slippers all have their role to play in this compelling collection.

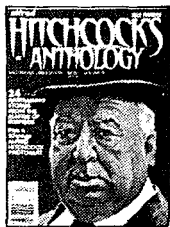


## DEATHREACH

Twenty-seven stories of death and revenge, each one more frightening than the last. A chilling collection by Donald Honig, James Cross, Stanley Abbott, Edward Hoch, Richard Hardwick and more.

## ANTHOLOGY #9

352 pages of the very best mystery, intrigue and devilish humor all with that special Hitchcock twist. Twenty-four hair-raising stories from Jack Ritchie, John Lutz, Donald Olson, Bill Pronzini and others.



Please send me the ALFRED HITCHCOCK anthologies indicated. Enclosed is my check or money order for \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Mail to: **ALFRED HITCHCOCK ANTHOLOGIES**  
P.O. Box 40  
Vernon, NJ 07462

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
CITY \_\_\_\_\_  
STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

## FEATURED

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> #22 A MYSTERY BY THE TALE | (\$4.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #21 WORDS OF PREY         | (\$4.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #19 GRAVE SUSPICIONS      | (\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #18 CRIME WATCH           | (\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #13 DEATHREACH            | (\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ANTHOLOGY #9              | (\$3.50) |

## ALSO AVAILABLE

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> #17 MORTAL ERRORS | (\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ANTHOLOGY #11     | (\$3.50) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> ANTHOLOGY #8      | (\$3.50) |

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery. Available only in the U.S.

DHC8BA

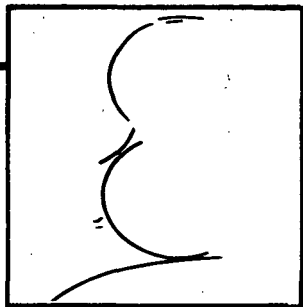


Copyright © 1987 Paramount Pictures Corporation

Michael Douglas and Glenn Close in *Fatal Attraction*

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



**I**t's time to catch up with two mystery movies that came out late last year: **Fatal Attraction** and **Someone to Watch Over Me**. Despite its Hitchcockian overtones we skipped reviewing *Fatal Attraction* because its mystery element was weak. But it did so well at the box office and inspired so much discussion, including a *Time* cover story, that we had to take notice of how powerful some of the Hitchcock formulas remain.

When happily married Michael Douglas has a casual sexual encounter with dynamic career girl Glenn Close, he finds himself at the mercy of a suddenly frantic and disturbed other-woman. Her campaign to destroy his marriage recalls the actions of the psychotic spurned lover who takes a knife and comes after Clint Eastwood and his girlfriend in *Play Misty for Me* (1971). *Fatal Attraction* es-

calates still further into terror and a violent, bloody confrontation that recalls the agonizingly extended killing scene in Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain*.

Director Brian de Palma, whose *Dressed to Kill* (1980) was one of the first movies to feature a shower scene meant to remind the audience of *Psycho*, likes to sprinkle his movies with Hitchcockian references. His emphasis on agonizingly slow exposition, though, and on knives, blood, and grotesque attitudes of death exploits Hitchcock weaknesses that the master kept under better control. Yet the ploddingly directed morality tale that is *Fatal Attraction* works on screen thanks to its having put together in just the right proportions the magic of two Hitchcock formulas. The first of these is the pilgrimage of the ordinary man into psychologically troubled waters, typically repre-



sented by a fatally attractive blonde like Glenn Close. The second is the surgically observed, luridly ingenious stalkings of the Hitchcockian killer—this time the blonde herself.

*Someone to Watch Over Me* tells essentially the same tale more quietly and tastefully, with the result that it has had less box office success. Here it's a young police lieutenant on his first assignment—bodyguarding a witness—who falls into an affair and then back into his marriage. The straying husband's innocence is established through the contrast between Tom Berenger's cramped house in a dangerous part of New York's borough of Queens and witness-seductress Mimi Rogers' palatially appointed rooms on Park Avenue. She is in real danger from the man she saw commit a murder, and so in the end is the lieutenant's family.

Like last year's *Bedroom Window*, *Someone to Watch Over Me* secures sympathy for a reluctant witness. This time the problem is not that testifying will embarrassingly reveal the witness's presence in her lover's apartment, but that the killer may take revenge. As Mimi Rogers' regular boyfriend points out, even if convicted he'll be out on probation in a few years and will probably come after

her. These mystery thrillers (together with *Witness*, which also featured an endangered eyewitness), are raising serious questions about the responsibilities of citizens within a flawed justice system.

The director of *Someone to Watch Over Me*, Ridley Scott, last came in for praise in "Murder by Direction" in connection with the science fiction-detective spectacular, *Blade Runner* (1982). He continues to show a special talent for finding breathtaking locales, notably the interior of the *Queen Mary* adapted to appear as if it's the latest posh disco-dance club. The Park Avenue apartment, actually built on a set in California, is the ultimate in lush but tasteful elegance. But even in filming the lieutenant going back and forth to Park Avenue in sequences of the kind we've seen endless times in the movies (and may know from personal experience as well) the camera finds special angles—once peeking at him through the centers of the circles made by a line of overhead handstraps.

*Fatal Attraction* and *Someone to Watch Over Me* are proof that the contemporary mystery movie continues to provide as much scope for both visual inventiveness and social issues as any other genre.



# THE STORY THAT WON

The November Mysterious photo) was won by Sandy Honorable mentions go to Youngstown, Ohio; J. N. Alder of Blacksburg, Virginia; Alberta, Canada; Flora consin; Peter M. Winkler of Jerry Stouffer of Half Moon Bay, California; Barbara Ellen Zaparka of Scottsdale, Arizona; Shirley Snell of Aztec, New Mexico; Phydella Hogan of Fayetteville, Arkansas; and Donna Lee Owens of Temple Hills, Maryland.



Photograph contest (see Edwards of Arlington, Texas. John and Rosa Dalbec of Merz of Bryan, Texas; Susan ia; Dick Morris of Calgary, Koeppen of Green Bay, Wisconsin; Franklin, Pennsylvania; Jerry Franklin, Pennsylvania; Barbara Ellen Zaparka of Scottsdale, Arizona; Shirley Snell of Aztec, New Mexico; Phydella Hogan of Fayetteville, Arkansas; and Donna Lee Owens of Temple Hills, Maryland.

## JUST THE FACTS by Sandy Edwards

She was short for a kid, shorter than most, but she was the only suspect we had. I know about these things. My name's Tuesday; I carry a badge.

"Okay, kid," my partner says. "What's your name?"

"Gretel," she replies.

"Gretel who?"

"Just Gretel." She was tougher than she looked.

"Got a brother named Hansel?"

"Could be."

"He was seen entering the forest with you. What happened to him?"

"Julia Child ate him."

"All right, Miss Smarty-pants," my partner sneers. "Next you'll be telling us the big, bad wolf blew your house down."

"I wasn't in that story—*pig*." A lot tougher.

"Now, look," I tell her. "We've been following breadcrumbs all morning, and we're in no mood for fairy tales. Just the facts, please, miss."

The kid's lower lip laps neatly over the upper one, and she just stands there, not saying a word. My partner's picking breadcrumbs out of his pockets, and the kid's picking the lock on her handcuffs, and that's when I hear it. Something stirs next to a clump of trees, and, from the look on the kid's face, she hears it, too.

My partner saunters over, draws back a branch from the underbrush, and peeks in. "Better have a look at this, Joe," he says.

I walk over and peer in. "Just as I suspected."

"You mean . . . ?"

"No doubt about it," I tell him, looking down at the sleeping Hansel. "It's a kid . . . napping."

# CLASSIFIED

# MARKET

AH-MARCH/88

ALFRED HITCHCOCK—published 13 times a year. CLASSIFIED AD rate is \$2.60 per word—payable in advance—(\$39.00 minimum). Capitalized words 40¢ per word additional.

## AGENTS WANTED

WANTED: Managers For Party Plan Business. Profitable. Easy. Free Details. RMB, Box 883, Stevens Point, WI 54481.

## AUTHOR'S SERVICE

PUBLISH YOUR BOOK! Join our successful authors. Publicity, advertising, beautiful books. All subjects invited. Send for fact-filled booklet and free manuscript report. Carlton Press, Dept. SM, 11 West 32 Street, New York 10001.

LOOKING for a publisher? Learn how you can have your book published, promoted, distributed. Send for free booklet. HP-5, Vantage Press, 516 W. 34th St., New York, NY 10001.

## AUTOMOBILES & MIDGET CARS

IS it true . . . Jeeps For \$44 Through The Government? Call For Facts! 1-312-742-1142 Ext. 4674.

CADILLACS, Mercedes, Porsche, etc. direct from Government. Seized in drug raids. Available your area. Save \$thousands\$. 216-453-3000, Ext. A9308.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS

FREE LIST! Used Hardcover mystery and detective fiction. Dunn's Mysteries, Box 2544, Meriden, CT 06450.

100,000 science fiction and mystery paperbacks, magazines, hardcovers. Free catalogs! Pandora's, Box Z-54, Neche, ND 58265-0133.

FREE CATALOG. Used hardback mystery, crime and detective books. Steve Powell, Dept. DP, The Hideaway, Bar Harbor, Maine 04609.

SUPERLEARNING! Triple learning speed through music! Develop Supermemory; Control stress; tap potentials. Free book excerpt & catalog (Distributors Wanted). Superlearning, 450-Z3 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY. 10123.

FREE CATALOG! Used hardback mystery, detective and true crime. Wallace Pratt, 1801 Gough St., San Francisco, CA 94109.

## BOOKS & PERIODICALS—Cont'd

FREE CATALOG: used hardback mysteries, crime, detective and spy fiction, list A: rare and first editions, list B: reading copies want lists accepted. MITCHELL BOOKS, 1395 E. WASHINGTON BL., PASADENA, CA 91104 (818) 798-4438.

A TREASURY OF VICTORIAN MURDER. Illustrated satirical account famous 19th century murders! \$6.95 at NBM-M, 35-53 70th St., Jackson Heights, N.Y. 11372.

"GREAT MONEY MAKING opportunity. AMAZING New book shows HOW to start your PROFITABLE business at home. WRITE TODAY for FREE details. George Vakis, 15105 Sherman Way, Apt. 209-A, Van Nuys, CA 91405.

MAKE YOUR CLASSIFIED AD PAY. Get "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls." Includes certificate worth \$2.00 towards a classified ad in this publication. Send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., Dept. CL, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

STAY HOME! MAKE MONEY ADDRESSING ENVELOPES. VALUABLE GENUINE OFFER. 20¢. Write Lindco, 3636-DA Peterson Ave., Chicago, IL 60659.

SELL Books! High Profits! No Minimum Orders! Free Catalog: Duke's Publishing, Box 183, Candler, Florida 32624.

BECOME A PROFESSIONAL REAL ESTATE APPRAISER OR PROPERTY MANAGER. Home Study or classes Atlanta, Los Angeles. Free information. National College of Appraisal. 800-223-4542.

TAKE PICTURES for profit. Try our unique methods. Write: Camera Ventures, Box 771, Lammar, CO 81052.

HOMEWORKERS! Earn 60¢ each envelope addressed, our instructions. Details: Distributors, Box 431-DG, Lynbrook, New York 11563.

# PLACE

# CLASSIFIED

AH-MARCH/88

To be included in the next issue please send order and remittance to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017.

## BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

GET RICH with your own mail order business. Free Details. Jeff Stork, Dept. AH, P.O. Box 951, Batavia, NY 14020.

\$1000 WEEKLY POSSIBLE! Mailing Envelopes! Easy Guaranteed Income! Free Details: Sevenstar, Box 187-DP, Niagara Falls, NY 14305.

## BUY IT WHOLESALE

400,000 BARGAINS Below Wholesale! Many Free! Liquidations ... Closeouts ... Job Lots ... Single Samples. Free Details. Worldwide Bargainhunters, Box 1409-IO, Holland MI 49424.

BEAUTIFUL 14-K gold jewelry, just \$12.00 "refundable" brings Two Giant full color catalogs—featuring over 14,000 items including gifts. Wright-Way Wholesale, 4242 Harrison Ave., Rockford, IL 61108.

## EDUCATION & INSTRUCTION

WITCHCRAFT Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME, no classes. Diploma awarded, low cost. Information free, call toll free anytime. 1-800-228-5600 or write: American School, Dept. 388, 850 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

## FOR INVENTORS

INVENTORS! Can you patent and profit from your idea? Call AMERICAN INVENTORS CORPORATION for free information. Over a decade of service. 1-800-228-5656. In Massachusetts or Canada call (413) 568-3753.

## GIFTS THAT PLEASE

A gift sure to please—ISAAC ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE, published monthly. Send \$19.50 for 13 issues (includes shipping & postage) to Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, P.O. Box 1933, Marion, OH 43305.

## HEALTH & BEAUTY

LOSE WEIGHT, stop smoking, become successful. Your subconscious mind does the work with subliminal tape programs! FREE INFORMATION on ordering and distributorships. SUCCESS ACHIEVEMENT, 3201 Pioneers Blvd., Ste. 200, Lincoln, NE 68502.

## INVENTIONS WANTED

PROTECT, PATENT AND DEVELOP. Your invention rights before sale. Registered Patent Agent and Licensed Professional Engineer. Send for FREE PATENT INFORMATION Every Inventor Should Have. Ricard L. Miller, 12 Parkside Drive, Suite-1, Dix Hills, NY 11746. (516) 499-4343.

## JEWELRY

SOLID GOLD JEWELRY MANUFACTURER DISTRIBUTORSHIP AVAILABLE. INFORMATION CASSETTE SEND \$1: GF, BOX 1016 HIGH RIDGE, MO 63049.

CLOSEOUT JEWELRY. 55¢ Dozen. 25¢ gets catalog. ROUSSELS, 107-310 Dow, Arlington, MA 02174-7199.

## LOANS BY MAIL

BORROW \$25,000 "OVERNIGHT." Any purpose. Keep indefinitely! Free Report! Success Research, Box 19739-SO, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

BORROW \$100-\$100,000! FAST, CONFIDENTIAL! MARIGOLD, BOX 2030-AA, RICHARDSON, TX 75080.

THE ARABS HAVE MILLIONS to Loan, Invest, Purchase! Free Details! PRS-DC, Box 417, Vidor, TX 77662.

## MAILING LISTS

FRESH HOT NAMES!! OPPORTUNITY SEEKERS. Peel/Stick Labels. Zip Coded. GUARANTEED DELIVERABLE! 500/\$20; 1000/\$35; 2000/\$60. JR Enterprises, 809 Briarwood-102, Victoria, Texas 77904.

# Classified Continued

AH-MARCH/88

## MAILING LISTS—Cont'd

**GUARANTEED Opportunity Buyers!** Thousands available weekly! Adhesive labels! 100/\$2.50; 200/\$4.50; 500/\$8.50; 1000/\$12.50. D-CO, Box 526-T, Griffith, IN 46319.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

30+ "SECRET" GET RICH QUICK BOOKS OF 1987, INTELLIGENTLY ANALYZED! Free details. Rolltop Publishing, 4300 NW 23rd Street, Suite 401-D, Box 1702, Gainesville, Florida 32602.

**CAN YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for \$500.00 weekly?** Send six 22¢ stamps. Blume, Box 866714, Plano, TX 75086.

**WOULD YOU STUFF 1000 envelopes for \$1,000.00?** Find out how. Sase To: Clemens Enterprises D, 3528 Esplendor Ave., Irving, Texas 75062.

\$60.00 per Hundred securing-stuffing envelopes from home. Offer-details: Rush stamped self-addressed envelope. Imperial, P-460, X17410, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33318.

THE original envelope stuffing business. Earn up to \$1500 weekly. Send \$1, SASE: Taylor Enterprises, Box 5924-D9, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T6C 4E8.

**GOOD MONEY! Weekly! Processing mail! Free Supplies, Postage! No Selling! Information?** Rush stamped envelope! Foodmaster-DCM, Burnt Hills, NY 12027.

**EASY Business, earn \$1,000's Weekly! Free details! Send Stamped Addressed Envelope:** Todco, Dept. 3, 4219 W. Olive Ave., Burbank, CA 91505.

**READ "How to Write a Classified Ad That Pulls."** Instructive booklet tells how to write an effective classified ad. Also includes certificates worth \$2.00 toward a classified ad in any of our publications. For your copy send \$2.25 (includes postage) to I.M. Bozoki, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

## MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES—Cont'd

**DIAMONDS!—Gemstones!** \$400/week easily earned part-time from home! How to import without experience/capital! Exciting report/sample free!!! Amethyst Box 2348-B3, Niagara Falls, N.Y. 14302-2348.

"GREAT MONEY MAKING opportunity. AMAZING NEW book shows HOW to start your PROFITABLE business at home. WRITE TODAY for FREE details. George Vakis, 15105 Sherman Way, Apt. 209-A, Van Nuys, CA 91405."

**SAVE HUNDREDS!!!** 40 sensational, revolutionary "Get Rich Quick" offers evaluated by professionals. Details \$2.00: "Lowdown", 1205 Guerneville, Santa Rosa, California 95403.

## OF INTEREST TO ALL

**PROTECT Your home and loved ones from crime.** Free FBI crime report. Write to: Security and Protection, Box 418207, Cin. O. 45241.

**COMPETE in games of strategy with Players across America!** FREE info: ALLIANCE, Box 1169, Oregon City, OR 97045.

## PERSONAL

**SINGLE? Widowed? Divorced?** Nationwide introductions! Refined, sincere people. 18-80. Identity, Box 315-DT, Royal Oak, Michigan 48068.

**BEAUTIFUL GIRLS SEEK FRIENDSHIP AND MARRIAGE.** American—Mexican—Philippine—European. Photo selection FREE! Latins, Box 1716-DD, Chula Vista, CA 92012.

**ORIENTAL ladies seeking correspondence, marriage.** Presentations by American husband, Filipina wife. Asian Experience, Box 1214T, Novato, CA 94948.

**INTERNATIONAL PEN FRIENDS—Exchange letters.** USA and foreign, your choice. Patricia Smith, 2061 Perry Terrace, Stuart, Florida 34997.

**YOU'LL MAKE  
MONEY**

**SAVE MONEY TOO—  
BY READING and ANSWERING  
THESE CLASSIFIED ADS**

# Classified Continued

AM-MARCH/88

## PERSONAL—Cont'd

**PEN Pals!** \$2.00 Two pals. Include age and photo. Steven—Marianne Kullmer, POB 418, Dysart, Iowa 52224.

**FIND** a dream wife. Guaranteed! Free photos, details. Write now. Quest, 14018 Downing, Beaverton, OR 97006.

**OBTAIN SUCCESS!** Unlock amazing subconscious abilities through hypnosis tapes. Certified Hypnotherapist. Free information. CHB Enterprises, Dept. A01 P.O. Box 12048, Baltimore, Maryland 21281.

**ATTRACTIVE, Faithful Oriental wives.** All ages. FREE details, photos. Anticipations, Box 2307K, MACPO, Makati, 3117 Philippines.

**JAPANESE.** Asian. European beauties seek friendship! Hundreds all ages! Information: Inter-Pacific, Box 304-T, Birmingham, Michigan 48012.

**HIGH SCHOOL AT HOME,** no classes. Diploma awarded, low cost. Information free, call toll free anytime. 1-800-228-5600 or write: American School, Dept. 388, 850 E. 58th St., Chicago, IL 60637.

**WITCHCRAFT** Occult Miracle Power Secrets Gavin and Yvonne Frost. Now accepting students. 1502-AN, Newbern, NC 28560.

## PRINTING, MINEOGRAPHING & MULTIGRAPHING

**PRINT** Booklets, 3¢. Print 1000 8½ × 11. \$15.12. Booklet Planning-Pricer Free. Speedybooks, 23860-5N Miles, Cleveland, Ohio 44128.

## SALESMEN-DISTRIBUTORS

**AD SPECIALTY SALES OPENINGS.** 78 Years in the Advertising Specialty and Calendar Industry have taught us the best Salespeople are Self-Starters who prefer the independence of straight commission sales over someone else calling the shots. NEWTON MFG. CO. offers that person the BEST Home Office Support in the Industry! Ask around! Weekly Commissions. 24 Hour Toll-Free Message Center, a Generous Cash Bonus and the Top Sample Program in the Business. All orders Acknowledged. Shipping Notices provided and MUCH MORE! No Investment. No Collections. Full or Part-time. You're your own Boss. Contact Kevin Peska. NEWTON MFG. CO., Dept. G01C2. Newton Iowa 50208.

## SONGWRITERS

**POEMS WANTED.** Songs recorded and published. Radio-TV promotions. Broadway Music Productions, Box 7438-DA, Sarasota, FL 33578.

## TAPES & CASSETTES

**OLDTIME** radio programs. Mysteries, adventure, suspense, science fiction, comedies. Classic tapes. Free catalogue. Carl D. Froelich, Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

## UNUSUAL BOOKS

**THE INTELLIGENCE LIBRARY:** Many unique books & official manuals on RESTRICTED subjects—Bugging, Wiretapping, Locksmithing, Covert Investigation, & MUCH MORE. Free brochures. MENTOR, DP, 135-53 No. Blvd., Flushing, N.Y. 11354.

## For Greater Savings...Results...and Profits...

PLACE YOUR AD IN ONE OF OUR SPECIAL COMBINATIONS:

Combo #1, Combo #2, or Combo #3.

Each combination is designed to give your ad the largest audience available.

Each combination offers you a Special Discount Rate.

For further information write to I. M. Bozoki, Classified Ad Manager, Davis Publications, Inc., 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

# 12 BEST-SELLING MYSTERIES JUST \$1

**A \$190.40 VALUE IN ORIGINAL  
PUBLISHERS' EDITIONS**

That's right! We'd like you to enjoy \$190.40 worth of great new mystery and suspense stories, as your introduction to The Detective Book Club . . . for over 45 years, the unsurpassed value leader in mystery fiction.

All 12 intriguing novels will be delivered to you in 4 specially-designed, easy-to-read triple-volumes, available exclusively from The Detective Book Club for *only \$1 plus shipping*.



## Top Quality Selections at Unbeatable Prices

As a member you'll forget daily cares as you solve baffling murder cases, suspenseful whodunits, tense courtroom conflicts and more, all featuring the challenging plots and gripping action that are the hallmarks of today's most-read mystery masters like Dick Francis, Elizabeth Peters, Tony Hillerman plus many others . . . chosen for Club members by our expert editors from among the more-than-400 mysteries published each year.

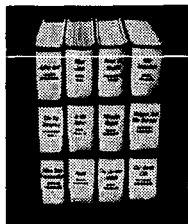
Best of all, each monthly Club selection (described in advance) is offered to you at *unequalled savings*. As a member, you're guaranteed 60% . . . and often 70%, 80% or more . . . off the original publishers' prices. Each selection includes three newly-published novels in one handsome hardbound triple-volume edition for *only \$11.95. That's just \$3.99 per full-length mystery!*

## No Risk, No Obligation

When you become a member of The Detective Book Club, there is *no minimum* number of books you must buy. You may reject any book *before or after* you receive it. You may cancel your membership at any time, with no obligation. It's that simple.

## Send No Money Now

Simply fill out the coupon on this page and return it to The Detective Book Club, Roslyn, N.Y. 11576. You'll enjoy a *10 day free trial* to examine the evidence and judge for yourself. *But act now!* If you love great mysteries, it would be a crime not to accept this offer.



Yes, please enroll me as a member and send me my 4 triple-volumes shown here, containing 12 mysteries. I enclose no money now. I may examine my books for 10 days, then will either accept all 4 volumes for only \$1 plus shipping, or return them and owe nothing.

As a member, I will receive free the Club's Preview describing my next selections. I will always have at least 30 days to reject any selection by returning the form provided. I may return any book within 30 days and owe nothing. For each triple-volume I keep, I will send you just \$11.95 plus shipping. I understand there are no minimum number of books I must buy and I may cancel my membership at any time.

88-CL  
D27M1Z

Mr./Mrs./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

PUBLISHED BY  
WALTER J. BLACK, INC.



**THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB,** Roslyn, N.Y. 11576

*Since 1942, the best way to get more mystery for your money.*

Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Offer slightly different in Canada.

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



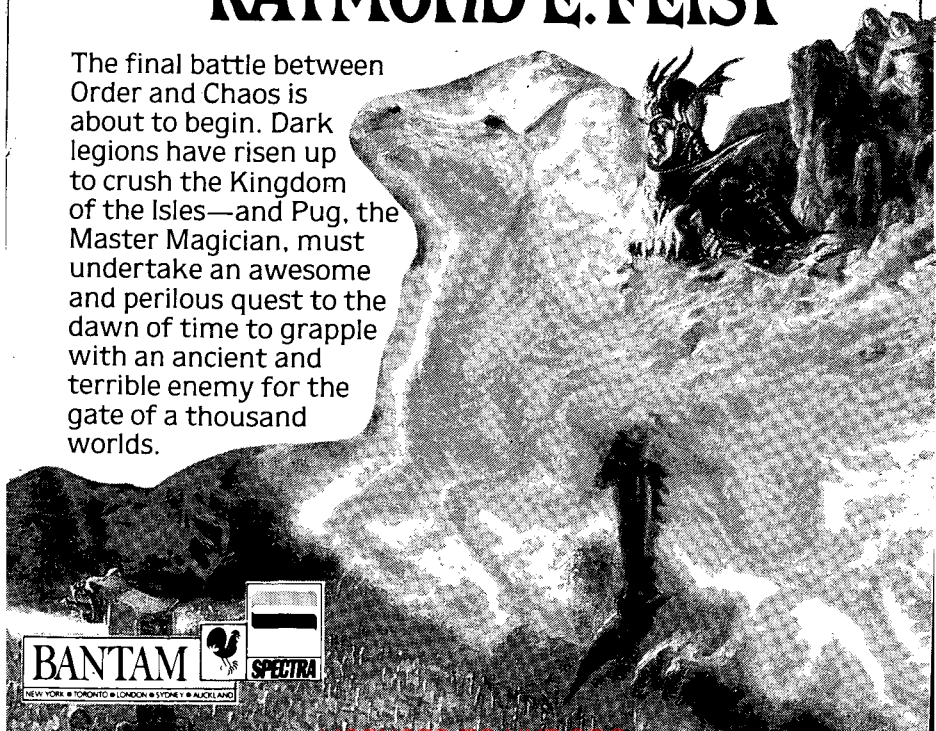
The new masterpiece  
of heroic fantasy reaches its  
heartstopping conclusion

# A DARKNESS AT SETHANON

VOLUME IV IN THE RIFTWAR SAGA  
BY

**RAYMOND E. FEIST**

The final battle between Order and Chaos is about to begin. Dark legions have risen up to crush the Kingdom of the Isles—and Pug, the Master Magician, must undertake an awesome and perilous quest to the dawn of time to grapple with an ancient and terrible enemy for the gate of a thousand worlds.



**BANTAM**



NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



# MURDER IN YOUR MAILBOX

12 Best  
Selling  
Mysteries  
Just \$1



See last page for details

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG  
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED